

FYODOR MIKHAILOVICH
DOSTOYEVSKY

A NASTY ANECDOTE

THIS NASTY anecdote occurred precisely at the time when, with such irrepressible force and such touchingly naive enthusiasm, the regeneration of our dear fatherland began, and its valiant sons were all striving toward new destinies and hopes. Then, one winter, on a clear and frosty evening, though it was already past eleven, three extremely respectable gentlemen were sitting in a comfortably and even luxuriously furnished room, in a fine two-storied house on the Petersburg side,¹ and were taken up with a solid and excellent conversation on a quite curious subject. These three gentlemen were all three of general's rank.² They were sitting around a small table, each in a fine, soft armchair, and as they conversed they were quietly and comfortably sipping champagne. The bottle was right there on the table in a silver bucket with ice. The thing was that the host, privy councillor Stepan Nikiforovich Nikiforov, an old bachelor of about sixty-five, was celebrating the housewarming of his newly purchased house, and, incidentally, his birthday, which happened to come along and which he had never celebrated before. However, the celebration was none too grand; as we have already seen, there were only two guests, both former colleagues of Mr. Nikiforov and his former subordinates, namely: actual state councillor Semyon Ivanovich Shipulenko and the other, also an actual state councillor, Ivan Ilyich Pralinsky. They came at around nine o'clock, had tea, then switched to wine, and knew that at exactly eleven-thirty they should go home. The host had liked regularity all his life. A couple of words about him: he began his career as a fortuneless petty clerk, quietly endured the drag for forty-five years on end, knew very well how far he would be promoted, could not bear having stars in his eyes, though he was already wearing two of them,³ and particularly disliked expressing his own personal opinion on any subject whatsoever. He was also honest, that is, he had never happened to do anything particularly dishonest; he was a bachelor because he was an egoist; he was far from stupid, but could not bear to display his intelligence; he particularly disliked sloppiness and rapturousness, which he considered moral sloppiness, and toward the end of his life sank entirely into some sweet, lazy comfort and systematic solitude. Though he himself sometimes visited people of the better sort, from his youth he could never bear to receive guests, and of late, when not playing patience, he was content with the company of his dining-room clock, imperturbably listening, as he dozed in his armchair, to its ticking under the glass dome on the mantelpiece. He was of extremely decent and clean-shaven appearance, looked younger than his years, was well preserved, promising to live a long time, and adhered to the strictest gentlemanliness. His post was rather comfortable: he sat somewhere and signed something. In short, he was considered a most excellent man. He had only one passion, or, better, one ardent desire: this was to own his own house, and precisely a grand house, not simply a solid one. His desire was finally realized: he picked out and purchased a house on the Petersburg side, far away, true, but the house had a garden, and was elegant besides. The new owner reasoned that far away was even better: he did not like receiving at home, and as for going to visit someone or to work—for that he had a fine two-place carriage of chocolate color, the coachman Mikhei, and two small but sturdy and handsome horses. All this had been duly acquired by forty years of painstaking economy, and so his heart rejoiced over it all. This was why, having acquired the house and moved into it, Stepan Nikiforovich felt such contentment in his peaceful heart that he even invited guests for his birthday, which before he used carefully to conceal from his closest acquaintances. He even had special designs on one of the invited. He himself occupied the upper story of the house, and he needed a tenant for the lower one, which was built and laid out in the same way. So Stepan Nikiforovich was counting on Semyon Ivanovich Shipulenko, and during the evening even twice turned the conversation to that subject. But Semyon Ivanovich kept silent in that regard. This was a man who had also had a long and difficult time cutting a path for himself, with black hair and side-whiskers and a permanently bilious tinge to his physiognomy. He was a married man, a gloomy homebody, kept his household in fear, served self-confidently, also knew very well what he would achieve and still better what he would never achieve, sat in a good post and sat very solidly. At the new ways that were beginning he looked, if not without bile, still with no special alarm: he was very confident of himself and listened not without mocking spite to Ivan Ilyich Pralinsky's expatiating on the new themes. However, they were all somewhat tipsy, so that even Stepan Nikiforovich himself condescended to Mr. Pralinsky and entered into a light dispute with him about the new ways. But a few words about His Excellency Mr. Pralinsky, the more so as he is the main hero of the forthcoming story.

Actual state councillor Ivan Ilyich Pralinsky had been called "Your Excellency" for only four months—in short, he was a young general. He was young in years, too, about forty-three, certainly not more, and in looks he appeared and liked to appear still younger. He was a tall, handsome man, who made a show of his dress and of the refined solidity of his dress, wore an important decoration on his neck⁴ with great skill, from childhood had managed to adopt a few high-society ways, and, being a bachelor, dreamed of a rich and even high-society bride. He dreamed of many other things as well, though he was far from stupid. At times he was a great talker and even liked to assume parliamentary poses. He came from a good family, was a general's son and a sybarite, in his tender childhood wore velvet and cambric, was educated in an aristocratic institution, and, though he did not come out of it with much learning, was successful in the service and even got himself as far as a generalship. His superiors considered him a capable man and even placed hopes in him. Stepan Nikiforovich, under whom he began and continued his service almost up to the generalship, never considered him a very practical man and did not place any hopes in him. But he liked that he was from a good family, had a fortune, that is, a big rental property with a manager, was related to some not-insignificant people, and, on top of that, carried himself well. Stepan Nikiforovich inwardly denounced him for surplus imagination and light-mindedness. Ivan Ilyich himself sometimes felt that he was too vain and even ticklish. Strangely, at times he was overcome by fits of some morbid

conscientiousness and even a slight repentance for something. With bitterness and a secret sting in his soul, he sometimes admitted that he had not flown at all as high as he thought. In those moments he would even fall into some sort of despondency, especially when his hemorrhoids were acting up, called his life *une existence manquée*,⁵ ceased believing (privately, of course) even in his parliamentary abilities, calling himself a *parleur*, a *phraseur*,⁶ and though all this was, of course, very much to his credit, it in no way prevented him from raising his head again half an hour later, and with still greater obstinacy and presumption taking heart and assuring himself that he would still manage to show himself and would become not only a dignitary, but even a statesman whom Russia would long remember. At times he even imagined monuments. From this one can see that Ivan Ilyich aimed high, though he kept his vague hopes and dreams hidden deep in himself, even with a certain fear. In short, he was a kind man, and even a poet in his soul. In recent years, painful moments of disappointment had begun to visit him more often. He became somehow especially irritable, insecure, and was ready to consider any objection an offense. But the reviving Russia suddenly gave him great hopes. The generalship crowned them. He perked up; he raised his head. He suddenly started talking much and eloquently, talking on the newest topics, which he adopted extremely quickly and unexpectedly, to the point of fierceness. He sought occasions for talking, drove around town, and in many places managed to become known as a desperate liberal, which flattered him greatly. That evening, having drunk some four glasses, he got particularly carried away. He wanted to make Stepan Nikiforovich, whom he had not seen for a long time prior to that and till then had always respected and even obeyed, change his mind about everything. For some reason he considered him a retrograde and attacked him with extraordinary heat. Stepan Nikiforovich made almost no objections and only listened slyly, though the topic interested him. Ivan Ilyich was getting excited and in the heat of the imagined dispute sampled from his glass more often than he should have. Then Stepan Nikiforovich would take the bottle and top up his glass at once, which, for no apparent reason, suddenly began to offend Ivan Ilyich, the more so in that Semyon Ivanych Shipulenko, whom he particularly despised and, moreover, even feared on account of his cynicism and malice, was most perfidiously silent just beside him, and smiled more often than he should have. "They seem to take me for a mere boy," flashed in Ivan Ilyich's head.

"No, sir, it's time, it's long since time," he went on with passion. "We're too late, sir, and, in my view, humaneness is the first thing, humaneness with subordinates, remembering that they, too, are people. Humaneness will save everything and keep it afloat..."

"Hee, hee, hee, hee!" came from Semyon Ivanovich's direction.

"But, anyhow, why are you scolding us so?" Stepan Nikiforovich finally objected, smiling amiably. "I confess, Ivan Ilyich, so far I'm unable to get the sense of what you're so kindly explaining. You put forward humaneness. That means the love of mankind, doesn't it?"

"Yes, if you wish, the love of mankind. I..."

"Excuse me, sir. As far as I'm able to judge, the point is not just in that. Love of mankind is always proper. But the reform is not limited to that. Questions have come up about the peasants, the courts, management, tax-farming,⁷ morality, and... and... and there's no end to them, these questions, and all together, all at once, they may produce great, so to speak, upheavals. That's what we're worried about, not just humaneness..."

"Yes, sir, the thing goes a bit deeper," Semyon Ivanovich observed.

"I understand very well, sir, and allow me to observe, Semyon Ivanovich, that I shall by no means agree to lag behind you in the depth of my understanding of things," Ivan Ilyich observed caustically and much too sharply. "However, even so I shall make so bold as to observe that you, Stepan Nikiforovich, also have not quite understood me..."

"No, I haven't."

"And yet I precisely hold to and maintain everywhere the idea that humaneness, and precisely humaneness with subordinates, from clerk to scrivener, from scrivener to household servant, from servant to peasant—humaneness, I say, may serve, so to speak, as the cornerstone of the forthcoming reform and generally toward the renewal of things. Why? Because. Take the syllogism: I am humane, consequently they love me. They love me, therefore they feel trust. They feel trust, therefore they believe; they believe, therefore they love... that is, no, I mean to say, if they believe, they will also believe in the reform, understand, so to speak, the very essence of the matter, will, so to speak, embrace each other morally and resolve the whole matter amicably, substantially. Why are you laughing, Semyon Ivanovich? Is it not clear?"

Stepan Nikiforovich silently raised his eyebrows; he was surprised.

"I think I've had a bit too much to drink," Semyon Ivanych observed venomously, "that's why I'm hard of understanding. A certain darkening of the mind, sir."

Ivan Ilyich winced.

"We won't hold out," Stepan Nikiforovich said suddenly, after slight reflection.

"That is, how is it we won't hold out?" asked Ivan Ilyich, surprised at Stepan Nikiforovich's sudden and fragmentary observation.

"Just so, we won't hold out." Stepan Nikiforovich obviously did not wish to expand further.

"You don't mean about new wine in new bottles?"⁸ Ivan Ilyich objected, not without irony. "Ah, no, sir; I can answer for myself."

At that moment the clock struck half past eleven.

"They sit and sit, then up and go," said Semyon Ivanych, preparing to get up from his place. But Ivan Ilyich forestalled him, rising from the table at once and taking his sable hat from the mantelpiece. He looked as if offended.

"Well, then, Semyon Ivanych, you'll think?" said Stepan Nikiforovich, seeing his guests off.

"About the apartment, you mean? I'll think, I'll think, sir."

"And let me know quickly once you decide."

"Still business?" Mr. Pralinsky observed amiably, fawning somewhat and playing with his hat. It seemed to him that he was being forgotten.

Stepan Nikiforovich raised his eyebrows and said nothing, as a sign that he was not keeping his guests. Semyon Ivanych hastily took his leave.

"Ah... well... as you wish, then... since you don't understand simple amiability," Mr. Pralinsky decided to himself, and somehow with particular independence offered his hand to Stepan Nikiforovich.

In the front hall Ivan Ilyich wrapped himself in his light, expensive fur coat, trying for some reason to ignore Semyon Ivanych's shabby raccoon, and they both started down the stairs.

"Our old man seemed offended," Ivan Ilyich said to the silent Semyon Ivanych.

"No, why?" the other replied calmly and coldly.

"The flunky!" Ivan Ilyich thought to himself.

They came out on the porch, and Semyon Ivanych's sleigh with its homely gray stallion drove up.

"What the devil! Where has Trifon gone with my carriage!" Ivan Ilyich cried, not seeing his equipage.

They looked this way and that—no carriage. Stepan Nikiforovich's man had no idea about it. They turned to Varlaam, Semyon Ivanych's coachman, and received the answer that he had been standing there all the while, and the carriage had been there, too, but now they were no more.

"A nasty anecdote!" said Mr. Shipulenko. "Want me to give you a lift?"

"Scoundrelly folk!" Mr. Pralinsky cried in rage. "The rascal asked me to let him go to some wedding here on the Petersburg side, some female crony was getting married, devil take her. I strictly forbade him to leave. And now I'll bet he's gone there!"

"Actually," Varlaam observed, "he did go there, sir, and he promised to manage it in just one minute, that is, to be here right on time."

"So there! I just knew it! He'll catch it from me!"

"You'd better give him a couple of good whippings at the police station, then he'll follow your orders," Semyon Ivanych said, covering himself with a rug.

"Kindly don't trouble yourself, Semyon Ivanych!"

"So you don't want a lift?"

"Safe journey, *merci*."

Semyon Ivanych drove off, and Ivan Ilyich went by foot along the wooden planks, feeling a rather strong irritation.

"No, you'll catch it from me now, you rogue! I'll go by foot on purpose so that you'll feel it, so that you'll get scared! He'll come back and find out that the master went by foot... blackguard!"

Ivan Ilyich had never cursed like that before, but he was very furious, and besides there was a clamor in his head. He was not used to drinking and therefore some five or six glasses worked quickly. But the night was delightful. It was frosty, but unusually calm and windless. The sky was clear, starry. The full moon flooded the earth with a matted silver gleam. It was so good that Ivan Ilyich, having gone some fifty steps, almost forgot his troubles. He was beginning to feel somehow especially pleasant. Besides, tipsy people change impressions quickly. He was even starting to like the plain wooden houses on the deserted street.

"It's really nice that I went by foot," he thought to himself, "both a lesson to Trifon and a pleasure for me. Indeed, I must go by foot more often. So what? On Bolshoi Prospect I'll find a cab at once. A nice night! What wretched little houses here. Must all be petty folk, clerks... merchants, maybe... that Stepan Nikiforovich! and what retrogrades they all are, the old nightcaps! Precisely nightcaps, *c'est le mot!*⁹ He's an intelligent man, though; he has this *bon sens*¹⁰ a sober, practical understanding of things. No, but these old men, old men! They lack... what do you call it? Well, they lack something... We won't hold out! What did he mean by that? He even fell to thinking when he said it. By the way, he didn't understand me at all. But how could he not? It's harder not to understand than to understand. Above all, I'm convinced, convinced in my soul. Humaneness... love of mankind. Restore man to himself... revive his personal dignity, and then... with this ready material get down to business. Seems clear! Yes, sir! I beg your pardon, Your Excellency, take the syllogism: we meet a clerk, for instance, a poor, downtrodden clerk. 'Well... what are you?' Answer: 'A clerk.' All right, so he's a clerk; then: 'What kind of a clerk?' Answer: such-and-such kind. 'You're in the civil service?' 'I am!' 'Want to be happy?' 'I do.' 'What does one need for happiness?' This and that. 'Why?' Because... And so the man understands me after a couple of words: the man is mine, the man is caught, so to speak, in the net, and I can do whatever I like with him—for his own good, that is. A nasty man, this Semyon Ivanych! And such a nasty mug... A whipping at the police station—he said it on purpose. No, lies, you do the whipping, I won't; I'll get Trifon with words, I'll get him with reproaches, and he'll feel it. About birch rods,¹¹ hm... an unsolved problem, hm... But shouldn't I stop at Emerance's? Pah, the devil, you cursed planks!" he cried, suddenly tripping. "And this is the capital! Enlightenment! You could break a leg. Hm. I hate this Semyon Ivanych; a most disgusting mug. He sniggered at me tonight when I said they'd embrace each other morally. So they will, and what do you care? You I won't embrace; sooner a peasant... I'll meet a peasant, and talk with a peasant. Anyhow, I was drunk, and maybe didn't express myself properly. Maybe I'm not expressing myself properly now either... Hm. I'm never going to drink. You babble in the evening, then the next day you repent. So what, I'm not staggering as I walk... And anyhow, they're all rogues!"

So Ivan Ilyich reasoned, desultorily and incoherently, as he went on down the sidewalk. The fresh air affected him and, so to speak, got him going. Another five minutes and he would have calmed down and wanted to sleep. But suddenly, about two steps from Bolshoi Prospect, he heard music. He looked around. On the other side of the street, in a very decrepit, one-story, but long wooden house, a great feast was going on, fiddles hummed, a string bass droned, and a flute spouted shrilly to a very merry quadrille tune. The public was standing under the windows, mostly women in quilted coats with kerchiefs on their heads; they strained all their efforts to make something out through the chinks in the blinds. Obviously there was merriment. The sound of the dancers' stomping reached the other side of the street. Ivan Ilyich noticed a policeman not far away and went up to him.

"Whose house is that, brother?" he said, throwing his expensive fur coat open slightly, just enough so that the policeman could notice the important decoration on his neck.

"The clerk Pseldonymov's, a legistrar,"¹² the policeman, who instantly managed to make out the decoration, replied,

straightening up.

"Pseldonymov? Hah! Pseldonymov!... What's he doing, getting married?"

"Getting married, Your Honor, to a titular councillor's daughter. Mlekopitaev,¹³ a titular councillor... served on the board. That house comes with the bride, sir."

"So it's already Pseldonymov's house, not Mlekopitaev's?"

"Pseldonymov's, Your Honor. Used to be Mlekopitaev's, and now it's Pseldonymov's."

"Hm. I'm asking, brother, because I'm his superior. I'm general over the place where Pseldonymov works."

"Right, Your Excellency." The policeman drew himself all the way up, but Ivan Ilyich seemed to have lapsed into thought. He was standing and reflecting ...

Yes, Pseldonymov actually was from his department, from his own office; he recalled that. He was a petty clerk, with a salary of about ten roubles a month. Since Mr. Pralinsky had taken over his office still very recently, he might not have remembered all his subordinates in too much detail, but Pseldonymov he did remember, precisely apropos of his last name. It had leaped out at him from the very first, so that he had been curious right then to have a closer look at the owner of such a name. He now recalled a man still very young, with a long, hooked nose, with blond and wispy hair, skinny and malnourished, in an impossible uniform, and unmentionables impossible even to the point of indecency. He remembered how the thought had flashed in him right then: should he not award the wretch some ten roubles to fix himself up for the holiday? But since the wretch's face was all too lenten, and had an extremely unpleasant look, even causing disgust, the good thought somehow evaporated of itself, and so Pseldonymov remained without a bonus. The greater was his amazement when this same Pseldonymov, not more than a week ago, put in a request to get married.¹⁴ Ivan Ilyich remembered that he had somehow had no time to occupy himself with the matter more thoroughly, so that the matter of the wedding had been decided lightly, hastily. But all the same he remembered with precision that Pseldonymov was taking his bride together with a wooden house and four hundred roubles in cash; this circumstance had surprised him then; he remembered even cracking a light joke about the encounter of the names Pseldonymov and Mlekopitaev. He clearly recalled it all.

As he went on recollecting, he fell to thinking more and more. It is known that whole trains of thought sometimes pass instantly through our heads, in the form of certain feelings, without translation into human language, still less literary language. But we shall attempt to translate all these feelings of our hero's and present the reader if only with the essence of these feelings, with what, so to speak, was most necessary and plausible in them. Because many of our feelings, when translated into ordinary language, will seem perfectly implausible. That is why they never come into the world, and yet everybody has them. Naturally, Ivan Ilyich's feelings and thoughts were a bit incoherent. But you know the reason why.

"What then!" flashed in his head. "So we all talk and talk, but once it gets to business, only a fig comes out. Here's an example, this very same Pseldonymov: he's just come from the church, all excited, all hopeful, expecting to taste... This is one of the most blissful days of his life... Now he's busy with the guests, giving a feast—modest, poor, but merry, joyful, sincere... What, then, if he knew that at this very moment I, I, his superior, his chief superior, am standing right here by his house and listening to his music! But how, in fact, would it be with him? No, how would it be with him if I should suddenly up and walk in now? hm... Naturally, he'd be frightened at first, numb with bewilderment. I'd be interfering with him, I'd probably upset everything... Yes, that's how it would be if any other general walked in, but not I... Here's the thing, that any other, only not I..."

"Yes, Stepan Nikiforovich! You didn't understand me just now, but here's a ready example for you.

"Yes, sir. We all shout about humaneness, but heroism, a great deed, that we're not capable of.

"What kind of heroism? This kind. Just consider: given the present-day relations between all members of society, for me, for me to come after midnight to the wedding of my subordinate, a registrar, who makes ten roubles—after all, this is bewilderment, this is a turnout of ideas, the last day of Pompeii,¹⁵ bedlam! No one will understand it. Stepan Nikiforovich would die before he understood it. Didn't he say: we won't hold out. Yes, but that's you old people, people of paralysis and stagnation, but I will hold out! I'll turn the last day of Pompeii into the sweetest day for my subordinate, and a wild act into a normal, patriarchal, lofty and e-thi-cal one. How? Like this. Be so good as to listen ...

"Well... here I am, suppose, going in: they're amazed, interrupt their dancing, stare wildly, back away. Right, sir, but here I show myself: I go straight to the frightened Pseldonymov and, with the tenderest smile, in the simplest words possible, say: 'Thus and so,' I say, 'I was visiting His Excellency Stepan Nikiforovich. I suppose you know, it's here in the neighborhood ...' Here I tell, lightly, in some amusing way, the adventure with Trifon. From Trifon I pass on to how I went by foot... 'Well—I hear music, I ask a policeman, and find out that you, brother, are getting married. Why don't I stop at my subordinate's, I think, to see how my clerks make merry and... get married. Now, you're not going to drive me out, I suppose!' Drive out! What a phrase for a subordinate. The devil he'll drive me out! I think he'll lose his mind, he'll rush headlong to sit me in an armchair, he'll tremble with delight, he won't even know what to make of it at first!...

"Well, what could be simpler, more gracious, than such an act! Why did I come? That's another question! That's, so to speak, the moral side of the matter. There's where the juice is!

"Hm... What was I thinking about? Ah, yes!

"So then, of course, they'll seat me next to the most important guest, some titular councillor, or a relative, a retired staff captain with a red nose... Gogol described these originals nicely. So, naturally, I make the acquaintance of the bride, praise her, encourage the guests. I beg them not to be embarrassed, to make merry, to go on dancing, I joke, I laugh, in short—I'm amiable and charming. I'm always amiable and charming when I'm pleased with myself. Hm... the thing is that I still seem to be a bit... that is, not drunk, but just..."

"... Naturally, being a gentleman, I'm on an equal footing with them and by no means demand any special tokens... But morally, morally it's another matter: they'll understand and appreciate... My act will resurrect in them all the nobility of... And so I sit there for half an hour... Even an hour. I'll leave, naturally, just before supper, otherwise they'll start bustling about, baking, frying, they'll bow low before me, but I'll just drink a glass, congratulate them, and decline supper. I'll say: business. And as soon as I pronounce 'business,' their faces will all become respectfully stern at once. By this I'll delicately give a reminder that they and I are—different, sirs. Earth and sky. Not that I'd want to impose

it, but it's needed... even in the moral sense it's necessary, whatever you say. However, I'll smile at once, even laugh, perhaps, and everyone will instantly cheer up... I'll joke once more with the bride; hm... and even this: I'll hint that I'll come again in exactly nine months as a godfather, heh, heh! And she'll certainly give birth by then. Because they multiply like rabbits. So everyone bursts out laughing, the bride blushes; I kiss her on the forehead with feeling, even bless her, and... tomorrow my deed is already known in the office. Tomorrow I'm stern again, tomorrow I'm demanding again, even implacable, but by now they all know who I am. They know my soul, they know my essence: 'He's stern as a superior, but as a man he's an angel!' And so I'm victorious; I've caught them with some one small act that wouldn't even occur to you; they're mine now; I'm the father, they're the children... Go on, Stepan Nikiforovich, Your Excellency, try doing something like that...

"... But do you know, do you understand, that Pseldonymov will recall for his children how the general himself feasted and even drank at his wedding! And those children will tell their children, and they will tell their grandchildren, like a sacred anecdote, that a dignitary, a statesman (and I'll be all that by then) deigned... etc., etc. But I'll raise the humiliated one morally, I'll restore him to himself... He gets a salary of ten roubles a month! But if I were to repeat this or some such thing five or ten times, I'd win popularity everywhere... I'd be impressed on everybody's heart, and the devil alone knows what might come of it later, this popularity!..."

Thus or almost thus reasoned Ivan Ilyich (gentlemen, a man sometimes says all sorts of things to himself, and in a somewhat peculiar state besides). All this reasoning flashed through his head in about half a minute, and, of course, he might have limited himself to these little dreams and, having mentally shamed Stepan Nikiforovich, gone quite calmly home and to bed. And it would have been well if he had! But the whole trouble was that the moment was a peculiar one.

As if on purpose, suddenly, at that very instant, his susceptible imagination pictured the complacent faces of Stepan Nikiforovich and Semyon Ivanovich.

"We won't hold out!" Stepan Nikiforovich repeated, smiling superciliously.

"Hee, hee, hee!" echoed Semyon Ivanovich with his nastiest smile.

"And now let's see how we won't hold out!" Ivan Ilyich said resolutely, and his face even flushed hotly. He stepped off the planks and with firm tread went straight across the street to the house of his subordinate, the registrar Pseldonymov.

His star drew him on. He walked briskly through the open gate and in disdain shoved aside with his foot the hoarse, shaggy little cur that, more for decency's sake than meaning any business, rushed at his legs with a rasping bark. By a wooden boardwalk he reached a covered porch, jutting like a booth into the yard, and by three decrepit wooden steps he went up to a tiny entryway. Though a tallow candle-end or something like a lamp was burning somewhere in a corner, that did not prevent Ivan Ilyich, just as he was, in galoshes, from stepping with his left foot into a galantine set out to cool. Ivan Ilyich bent down and, looking with curiosity, saw standing there two more dishes of some sort of aspic, as well as two molds, obviously of blancmange. The squashed galantine embarrassed him a bit, and for one tiny instant the thought flitted through him: shouldn't I slip away right now? But he considered it too low. Reasoning that no one had seen and that no one was going to suspect him, he quickly wiped off the galosh, so as to conceal all traces, groped for the felt-upholstered door, opened it, and found himself in the tiniest of anterooms. One half of it was literally heaped with overcoats, caftans, cloaks, bonnets, scarves, and galoshes. In the other half the musicians had settled: two fiddles, a flute, and a string bass, four men in all, brought in, naturally, from the street. They were sitting by an unpainted wooden table, with one tallow candle, and sawing away for all they were worth at the last figure of a quadrille. Through the open door to the main room people could be seen dancing, in dust, smoke, and haze. It was somehow furiously merry. Guffaws, shouts, and ladies' shrieks were heard. The cavaliers were stomping like a squadron of horses. Above this whole pandemonium sounded the commands of the master of ceremonies, probably an extremely unconstrained and even unbuttoned man: "Cavaliers, step out, *chaîne de dames, balancez!*"¹⁶ and so on and so forth. Ivan Ilyich, in some slight agitation, threw off his fur coat and galoshes and, holding his hat, entered the room. Anyhow, he was no longer reasoning...

For the first moment no one noticed him: they were all finishing the end of the dance. Ivan Ilyich stood as if stunned and could make out nothing of this porridge in detail. Ladies' dresses, cavaliers with cigarettes in their teeth flashed by... some lady's light blue scarf flashed by and brushed his nose. After her, in furious ecstasy, a medical student swept, his tousled hair all in a whirl, and shoved him hard on his way. Before him also flashed, long as a milepost, an officer of some regiment. Someone shouted in an unnaturally shrill voice as he flew by, stomping, with everyone else: "E-e-eh, Pseldonymushka!" There was something sticky under Ivan Ilyich's feet: the floor must have been waxed. In the room, not a small one incidentally, there were upward of thirty guests.

But a minute later the quadrille was over, and almost at once the very thing took place which Ivan Ilyich had imagined as he was dreaming on the plank sidewalk. Some sort of hum, some sort of extraordinary whisper passed through the guests and dancers, who had not yet had time to catch their breath and wipe the sweat from their faces. All eyes, all faces quickly began to turn to the newly entered guest. Then at once everyone started slowly retreating and backing away. Those who had not noticed were pulled by the clothes and brought to reason. They would look around and at once start backing away along with the others. Ivan Ilyich went on standing by the door, not taking one step forward, and the open space between him and the guests, the floor strewn with countless candy wrappers, tickets, and cigarette butts, was growing wider and wider. Suddenly a young man in a uniform, with wispy blond hair and a hooked nose, timidly stepped into this space. He moved forward, bending, and looked at the unexpected guest in exactly the same way as a dog looks at its master who has called it in order to give it a kick.

"Hello, Pseldonymov, recognize me?..." said Ivan Ilyich, and in that same instant felt that he had said it terribly awkwardly; he also felt that at that moment he was, perhaps, committing the most frightful foolishness.

"Y-Y-Your Ex-cellyency!..." mumbled Pseldonymov.

"Well, so there. I stopped entirely by chance, brother, as you can probably imagine..."

But Pseldonymov obviously could not imagine anything. He stood, goggle-eyed, in terrible bewilderment.

"You won't drive me out, I suppose... Glad or not, welcome the guest!..." Ivan Ilyich went on, feeling that he was

abashed to the point of indecent weakness, that he wished to smile but no longer could; that the humorous story about Stepan Nikiforovich and Trifon was becoming more and more impossible. But Pseldonymov, as if on purpose, would not come out of his stupor and went on staring at him with an utterly foolish look. Ivan Ilyich cringed, he felt that another minute like this and an incredible bedlam would break out.

"Maybe I've interfered with something... I'll go!" he barely uttered, and some nerve twitched at the right corner of his mouth ...

But Pseldonymov recovered himself...

"Your Excellency, good heavens, sir... The honor..." he was mumbling, bowing hurriedly, "deign to sit down, sir..." And, still more recovered, he showed him with both hands to the sofa, from which the table had been moved aside for the dancing ...

Ivan Ilyich felt relieved and lowered himself onto the sofa; someone rushed at once to move the table back. He glanced around cursorily and noticed that he alone was sitting down, while all the others were standing, even the ladies. A bad sign. But it was not yet time to remind and encourage. The guests still kept backing away, and before him, bent double, there still stood Pseldonymov alone, who still understood nothing and was far from smiling. It was nasty; in short: during this moment our hero endured such anguish that his Harun-al-Rashidian¹⁷ invasion of his subordinate, for the sake of principle, could actually have been considered a great deed. But suddenly some little figure turned up beside Pseldonymov and started bowing. To his inexpressible pleasure and even happiness, Ivan Ilyich at once recognized him as a chief clerk from his office, Akim Petrovich Zubikov, with whom he was not, of course, acquainted, but whom he knew to be an efficient and uncomplaining official. He immediately rose and proffered Akim Petrovich his hand, the whole hand, not just two fingers. The man received it in both of his palms with the deepest reverence. The general was triumphant; all was saved.

And actually Pseldonymov was now, so to speak, not the second, but the third person. He could turn directly to the chief clerk with his story, necessarily taking him as an acquaintance and even a close one, and Pseldonymov meanwhile could simply keep silent and tremble with awe. Consequently, decency was observed. And the story was necessary; Ivan Ilyich felt it; he saw that all the guests were expecting something, that even all the domestics were crowding both doorways, almost climbing on one another in order to see and hear him. The nasty thing was that the chief clerk, in his stupidity, still would not sit down.

"Come, come!" said Ivan Ilyich, awkwardly indicating the place beside him on the sofa.

"Good heavens, sir... here's fine, sir..." and Akim Petrovich quickly sat down on a chair, offered him almost in flight by Pseldonymov, who stubbornly remained on his feet.

"Can you imagine what's happened," Ivan Ilyich began, addressing Akim Petrovich exclusively, in a somewhat trembling but now casual voice. He even drew out and separated the words, emphasized their syllables, began to pronounce the letter *a* somehow like *ah*—in short, he himself felt and was aware that he was being affected, but was no longer able to control himself; some external force was at work. He was painfully aware of terribly much at that moment.

"Can you imagine, I'm only just coming from Stepan Nikiforovich Nikiforov's—you've heard of him, perhaps, a privy councillor. Well... on that commission..."

Akim Petrovich leaned his whole body forward deferentially, as if to say: "How could I have not heard, sir."

"He's your neighbor now," Ivan Ilyich went on, momentarily addressing Pseldonymov, for the sake of propriety and naturalness, but quickly turning away, seeing at once from Pseldonymov's eyes that it made decidedly no difference to him.

"The old man, as you know, was raving all his life about buying himself a house... So now he's bought it. The prettiest little house. Yes... And today also happened to be his birthday, though he never celebrated it before, even concealed it from us, making excuses out of stinginess, heh, heh! and now he's so glad of his new house that he invited me and Semyon Ivanovich. You know—Shipulenko."

Akim Petrovich leaned forward again. Zealously leaned forward! Ivan Ilyich was somewhat comforted. For it had already occurred to him that the chief clerk might perhaps surmise that, at that moment, he was a necessary point of support for His Excellency. That would have been nastiest of all.

"Well, we three sat there, he stood us to some champagne, talked about business... Well, about this and that... about pro-blems... Even had a little dis-pute... Heh, heh!"

Akim Petrovich deferentially raised his eyebrows.

"Only that's not the thing. I finally say good night to him, he's a punctual old man, goes to bed early—old age, you know. I go out... my Trifon isn't there! I worry, I ask: 'What did Trifon do with the carriage?' It turns out that, in hopes I'd stay long, he went to the wedding of some female crony of his or else his sister... God knows with him. Somewhere here on the Petersburg side. And incidentally took the carriage." Again, for propriety's sake, the general glanced at Pseldonymov. The man bent double instantly, but not at all in the way the general would have liked. "No sympathy, no heart," flashed in his head.

"You don't say!" said the deeply struck Akim Petrovich. A little hum of astonishment went through the whole crowd.

"Can you imagine my position..." (Ivan Ilyich glanced at them all.) "No help for it, I set out by foot. I thought I'd toddle along to Bolshoi Prospect, and there find some cabbie... heh, heh!"

"Hee, hee, hee!" Akim Petrovich echoed deferentially. Again a hum, now on a merry note, passed through the crowd. At that moment the glass of a wall lamp cracked with a loud noise. Someone zealously rushed to put it right. Pseldonymov roused himself and gave the lamp a stern look, but the general did not even pay attention, and everything quieted down.

"I'm walking... and the night is so beautiful, still. Suddenly I hear music, stomping, dancing. I ask a policeman: Pseldonymov's getting married. So, brother, you're throwing a ball for the whole Petersburg side? ha, ha," he suddenly addressed Pseldonymov again.

"Hee, hee, hee! yes, sir..." echoed Akim Petrovich; the guests stirred again, but the stupidest thing of all was that Pseldonymov, though he did bow again, even now did not smile, just as if he were made of wood. "Is he a fool, or what?"

thought Ivan Ilyich. "The ass ought to have smiled now, then everything would go swimmingly." Impatience raged in his heart. "I thought, why not visit my subordinate. He won't drive me out... glad or not, welcome the guest. Excuse me, please, brother. If I'm interfering, I'll go... I only stopped to have a look..."

But little by little a general movement was beginning. Akim Petrovich gazed with a sweetened air, as if to say: "Could Your Excellency possibly interfere?" All the guests were stirring and beginning to show the first tokens of casualness. The ladies almost all sat down. A good and positive sign. Those who were braver fanned themselves with handkerchiefs. One of them, in a shabby velvet dress, said something deliberately loudly. The officer she had addressed also wanted to reply loudly, but since the two of them were the only loud ones, he passed. The men, most of them clerks, plus two or three students, exchanged glances, as if urging each other to loosen up, coughed, and even began making a couple of steps in different directions. Anyhow, none of them was particularly timid, only they were all uncouth and almost all of them looked with animosity at the person who had barged in on them to disrupt their merry-making. The officer, ashamed of his pusillanimity, gradually began to approach the table.

"But listen, brother, allow me to ask your name and patronymic?" Ivan Ilyich asked Pseldonymov.

"Porfiry Petrovich, Your Excellency," the man replied, goggle-eyed, as if on review.

"Now then, Porfiry Petrovich, introduce me to your young wife... Take me to... I..."

And he made a show of getting up. But Pseldonymov rushed headlong to the drawing room. The young bride, however, had been standing right at the door, but on hearing that the talk was about her, she hid at once. A minute later Pseldonymov led her out by the hand. Everyone made way, letting them pass. Ivan Ilyich rose solemnly and addressed her with a most amiable smile.

"Very, very glad to make your acquaintance," he said with a most high-society half bow, "and what's more on such a day..."

He gave a most insidious smile. The ladies got pleasantly excited.

"Sharmay," the lady in the velvet dress said almost aloud.

The bride was worthy of Pseldonymov. This was a thin little damsel, still only some seventeen years old, pale, with a very small face and a sharp little nose. Her small eyes, quick and furtive, were not at all abashed, but, on the contrary, looked at him intently and even with a certain tinge of spite. Obviously, Pseldonymov had not taken her for her beauty. She was wearing a white muslin dress with pink doubling. Her neck was skinny, her body like a chicken's, all protruding bones. To the general's greeting she was able to say precisely nothing.

"Yes, you got yourself a pretty little thing," he went on in a low voice, as if addressing Pseldonymov alone, but purposely so that the bride heard it, too. But Pseldonymov said precisely nothing here as well, and this time did not even sway. It even seemed to Ivan Ilyich that there was in his eyes something cold, secretive, even something kept to himself, peculiar, malignant. And yet he had at all costs to get at some feeling. It was for that he came.

"A fine pair, though," he thought. "However..."

And he again addressed himself to the bride, who was placed beside him on the sofa, but all he received to his two or three questions was again only a "yes" or a "no," and in fact he did not quite receive even that.

"If only she'd get a little embarrassed," he went on to himself. "Then I could start joking. Otherwise there's no way out." And Akim Petrovich, as if on purpose, was also silent, though only out of stupidity, but still it was inexcusable.

"Gentlemen! am I not perhaps interfering with your pleasures?" he tried to address everyone in general. He felt that his palms were even sweating.

"No, sir... Don't worry, Your Excellency, we'll get started right away, and for now... we're cooling our heels, sir," the officer replied. The bride glanced at him with pleasure: the officer was still young and wore the uniform of some command or other. Pseldonymov stood right there, thrusting himself forward, and seemed to stick his hooked nose out still more than before. He listened and watched, like a lackey who stands holding a fur coat and waiting for the parting words of his masters to come to an end. Ivan Ilyich made this comparison himself; he was at a loss, felt that he was ill at ease, terribly ill at ease, that the ground was slipping from under his feet, that he had gotten somewhere and could not get out, as if in the dark.

Suddenly everyone stepped aside, and a heavyset and not very tall woman appeared, elderly, simply dressed though with some festiveness, a big shawl around her shoulders, pinned at the throat, and wearing a bonnet to which she was obviously not accustomed. In her hands was a small, round tray on which stood a not yet started, but already uncorked, bottle of champagne and two glasses, no more nor less. The bottle was evidently meant for only two guests.

The elderly woman went straight up to the general.

"Don't find fault, Your Excellency," she said, bowing, "but since you haven't disdained us, doing us the honor of coming to my son's wedding, be so kind as to congratulate the young folk with wine. Don't disdain it, do us the honor."

Ivan Ilyich seized upon her as his salvation. She was not such an old woman, about forty-five or -six, no more. But she had such a kind, red-cheeked, such an open, round Russian face, she smiled so good-naturedly, bowed so simply, that Ivan Ilyich was almost reassured and began to have hopes.

"So yo-o-ou are the ma-ter-nal pa-a-arent of your so-o-on?" he said, rising from the sofa.

"The maternal parent, Your Excellency," Pseldonymov maundered, stretching his long neck and again sticking his nose out.

"Ah! Very glad, ve-ry glad to make your acquaintance."

"Don't scorn us, then, Your Excellency."

"Even with the greatest pleasure."

The tray was set down, Pseldonymov leaped over and poured the wine. Ivan Ilyich, still standing, took the glass.

"I am especially, especially glad of this occasion, since I can..." he began, "since I can... herewith pay my... In a word, as a superior... I wish you, madam" (he turned to the bride), "and you, my friend Porfiry—I wish you full, prosperous, and enduring happiness."

And, even with emotion, he drank off the glass, his seventh that evening. Pseldonymov looked serious and even sullen.

The general was beginning to hate him painfully.

"And this hulk" (he glanced at the officer) "is stuck here, too. Why doesn't he shout 'hurrah!' Then it would take off, take right off..."

"And you, too, Akim Petrovich, drink and congratulate them," added the old woman, addressing the chief clerk. "You're a superior, he's your subordinate. Look after my boy, I ask you as a mother. And don't forget us in the future, dear Akim Petrovich, kind man that you are."

"How nice these Russian old women are!" thought Ivan Ilyich. "She's revived them all. I've always liked our folkways..."

At that moment another tray was brought to the table. It was carried by a wench in a rustling, not yet laundered calico dress with a crinoline. She could barely get her arms around the tray, it was so big. On it was a numberless multitude of little plates with apples, bonbons, gumdrops, candied fruit, walnuts, and so on and so forth. Till then the tray had been in the drawing room, for the pleasure of all the guests, mainly the ladies. But now it was brought over to the general alone.

"Don't scorn our victuals, Your Excellency. What we've got, we're glad to give," the old woman repeated, bowing.

"Heavens..." said Ivan Ilyich, and even with pleasure he took and crushed between his fingers a single walnut. He was resolved to be popular to the end.

Meanwhile the bride suddenly began to giggle.

"What, ma'am?" Ivan Ilyich asked with a smile, glad of some signs of life.

"It's Ivan Kostenkinych there, making me laugh, sir," she replied, looking down.

The general actually made out a blond youth, not bad-looking at all, hiding on the other side of the sofa in a chair, who kept whispering something to Madame Pseldonymov. The youth got up. He was apparently very timid and very young.

"I was telling her about the 'dream book,'¹⁸ Your Excellency," he murmured, as if making an excuse.

"About what dream book?" Ivan Ilyich asked indulgently.

"The new one, sir, the literary one. I was telling her, sir, that if you see Mr. Panaev¹⁹ in your dreams, it means you'll spill coffee on your shirtfront, sir."

"What innocence," thought Ivan Ilyich, even angrily. The youth, though he became very red as he was saying it, was still incredibly glad that he had told about Mr. Panaev.

"Well, yes, yes, I've heard..." responded His Excellency.

"No, there's an even better one," another voice said, right beside Ivan Ilyich, "there's a new lexicon being published, they say Mr. Kraevsky himself will write articles, Alferaki... and *esposé* literature..."²⁰

This was said by a young man, not a bashful one this time, but a rather casual one. He was wearing gloves, a white waistcoat, and held his hat in his hand. He did not dance, had a supercilious look, because he was a collaborator on the satirical magazine *The Firebrand*, set the tone, and showed up at this wedding by chance, invited as a guest of honor by Pseldonymov, with whom he was on intimate terms and with whom, still last year, he had shared a life of poverty "in corners"²¹ rented from some German woman. He did drink vodka, however, and for that purpose had already absented himself more than once to a cozy little back room, the way to which was known to all. The general took a terrible dislike to him.

"And that's funny, sir, because," the blond youth suddenly interrupted joyfully, the one who had told about the shirtfront and to whom the collaborator in the white waistcoat had given a hateful look for it, "funny because, Your Excellency, the writer assumes that Mr. Kraevsky doesn't know how to spell and thinks that '*exposé* literature' should be written '*esposé* literature'..."

But the poor youth barely finished. He could see by his eyes that the general had known that long ago, because the general also became as if abashed himself, obviously because he did know it. The young man was incredibly ashamed. He managed hurriedly to efface himself somewhere, and for the rest of the time afterward was very sad. Instead, the casual collaborator on *The Firebrand* came closer still and, it seemed, was intending to sit down somewhere nearby. To Ivan Ilyich such casualness seemed a bit ticklish.

"Yes! tell me, please, Porfiry," he began, in order to talk about something, "why—I've been wanting to ask you personally about it—why are you called Pseldonymov, and not Pseudonymov? Surely you're Pseudonymov?"

"I'm unable to give a precise report, Your Excellency," Pseldonymov replied.

"It must have been mixed up already on his father's papers, sir, when he entered the service, sir, so now he's stayed Pseldonymov," Akim Petrovich responded. "It happens, sir."

"Ab-so-lutely," the general picked up heatedly, "ab-so-lutely, because, consider for yourself: Pseudonymov—that comes from the literary word 'pseudonym.' Well, and Pseldonymov doesn't mean anything."

"Out of stupidity, sir," Akim Petrovich added.

"That is, what, in fact, is out of stupidity?"

"The Russian people, sir; out of stupidity they sometimes change letters, sir, and pronounce things sometimes in their own way, sir. For instance, they say *ninvalid*, when they ought to say *invalid*, sir."

"Well, yes... *ninvalid*, heh, heh, heh..."

"They also say *liberry*, Your Excellency," the tall officer blurted out, having long had an itch to distinguish himself somehow.

"That is, *liberry* meaning what?"

"*Liberry* instead of *library*, Your Excellency."

"Ah, yes, *liberry*... instead of *library*... Well, yes, yes... heh, heh, heh!..." Ivan Ilyich was obliged to chuckle for the officer as well.

The officer straightened his tie.

"And they also say *perfick*," the collaborator on *The Firebrand* attempted to mix in. But His Excellency tried this time not to hear. He was not going to chuckle for everyone.

"*Perfick* instead of *perfect*," the "collaborator" went on pestering with visible irritation.

Ivan Ilyich gave him a stern look.

"Stop pestering him!" Pseldonymov whispered to the collaborator.

"What do you mean, I'm just talking. What, can't I talk?" the other objected in a whisper, but nevertheless fell silent and with concealed rage left the room.

He made his way straight to the alluring little back room where, ever since the evening began, a small table had been placed for the dancing gentlemen, covered with a Yaroslavl tablecloth, on which stood vodka of two kinds, pickled herring, cheap caviar, and a bottle of the strongest sherry from the national cellar.²² With spite in his heart, he was just pouring himself some vodka, when suddenly in ran the medical student with the tousled hair, the foremost dancer and can-canner at Pseldonymov's ball. With hasty greed he rushed for the decanter.

"They're starting now!" he said, hurriedly serving himself. "Come and watch: I'll do a solo upside down, and after supper I'll risk the *fish*."²³ It's even suitable for a wedding. A friendly hint, so to speak, to Pseldonymov... She's nice, this Kleopatra Semyonovna, you can risk whatever you like with her."

"He's a retrograde," the collaborator said gloomily, drinking his glass.

"Who's a retrograde?"

"That one, that personage, sitting in front of the gumdrops. A retrograde, I tell you!"

"Ah, you!" the student muttered, and dashed out of the room, hearing the ritornello of the quadrille.

The collaborator, left alone, poured himself some more for the sake of greater bravado and independence, drank up, ate a bite, and never before had the actual state councillor Ivan Ilyich acquired for himself a fiercer enemy or a more implacable avenger than this slighted-by-him collaborator on *The Firebrand*, especially after two glasses of vodka. Alas! Ivan Ilyich suspected nothing of the sort. Nor did he yet suspect another capital circumstance, which had an influence on all further mutual relations of the guests with His Excellency. The thing was that, though for his part he had given a decent and even detailed explanation of his presence at his subordinate's wedding, this explanation had not in fact satisfied anyone, and the guests went on being embarrassed. But suddenly everything changed, as if by magic; they all calmed down and were ready to make merry, guffaw, squeal, and dance just as if the unexpected guest were not in the room at all. The reason for it was the rumor, the whisper, the news which suddenly spread, no one knew how, that the guest seemed to be... under the influence. And though the matter had, at first glance, the look of the most terrible slander, it gradually began to justify itself, as it were, so that everything suddenly became clear. What's more, they suddenly became extraordinarily free. And it was at this same moment that the quadrille began, the last one before supper, to which the medical student had hastened so.

And just as Ivan Ilyich was addressing himself to the bride again, trying this time to get at her with some quip, the tall officer suddenly jumped over to her and swung himself down on one knee. She jumped up from the sofa at once and fluttered off with him to line up for the quadrille. The officer did not even apologize, nor did she even glance at the general as she left, as if she were even glad of her deliverance.

"However, essentially she's in her rights," thought Ivan Ilyich, "and besides, they don't know propriety."

"Hm... you mustn't stand on ceremony, brother Porfiry," he turned to Pseldonymov. "Perhaps you have something there... to tend to... or whatever... please, don't be embarrassed.—Is he keeping watch on me, or what?" he added to himself.

He was beginning to find Pseldonymov unbearable, with his long neck and eyes fixed intently on him. In short, all this was not it, not it at all, but Ivan Ilyich was still far from wanting to admit it.

The quadrille began.

"Shall I, Your Excellency?" Akim Petrovich asked, deferentially holding the bottle in his hands and preparing to fill His Excellency's glass.

"I... I don't really know if..."

But Akim Petrovich, with a reverently beaming face, was already pouring the champagne. Having filled his glass, he also, as if on the sly, as if thievishly, shrinking and cringing, filled his own, with the difference that he filled it one whole finger less, which was somehow more deferential. He was like a woman in childbirth sitting next to his immediate superior. What indeed was he to talk about? Yet he had to entertain His Excellency even out of duty, since he had the honor of keeping him company. The champagne served as a way out, and it was even pleasing to His Excellency to have his glass filled—not for the sake of the champagne, which was warm and the most natural swill, but just so, morally pleasing.

"The old boy wants a drink himself," thought Ivan Ilyich, "and he doesn't dare without me. I mustn't hinder... And it's ridiculous if the bottle just stands between us."

He took a sip, which in any case seemed better than just sitting there.

"I'm here," he began, with pauses and emphases, "I'm here, so to speak, by chance, and, of course, it may be that the others find... that it's... so to speak, in-ap-pro-priate for me to be at such a... gathering."

Akim Petrovich was silent and listened with timid curiosity.

"But I hope you understand why I'm here... It's not really that I came to drink wine. Heh, heh!"

Akim Petrovich was about to chuckle along with His Excellency, but somehow stopped short and again did not respond with anything reassuring.

"I'm here... in order, so to speak, to encourage... to show, so to speak, a moral, so to speak, goal," Ivan Ilyich went on, vexed at Akim Petrovich's obtuseness, but suddenly fell silent himself. He saw that poor Akim Petrovich had even lowered his eyes, as if he were guilty of something. The general, in some perplexity, hastened to take another sip from his glass, while Akim Petrovich, as if his whole salvation lay in it, seized the bottle and poured more.

"It's not that you have so many resources," thought Ivan Ilyich, looking sternly at poor Akim Petrovich. The latter, sensing this stern general's glance on him, resolved now to be definitively silent and not raise his eyes. So they sat facing

each other for two minutes or so, a painful two minutes for Akim Petrovich.

A couple of words about this Akim Petrovich. He was a placid man, like a hen, of the oldest cast, nurtured on obsequiousness, and yet a kind man and even a noble one. He came from Petersburg Russians—that is, both his father and his father's father were born, grew up, and served in Petersburg and never once left Petersburg. These are a totally special type of Russian people. They have scarcely the faintest notion of Russia, and that does not trouble them at all. Their whole interest is confined to Petersburg and, above all, to the place where they serve. All their cares are concentrated around penny preference, grocery shop, and monthly salary. They do not know even a single Russian custom, nor a single Russian song, except "Luchinushka,"²⁴ and that only because barrel organs play it. However, there are two essential and unshakable tokens by which you may instantly distinguish a true Russian from a Petersburg Russian. The first is that all Petersburg Russians, all, without exception, always say *Academic Bulletin* and never *Petersburg Bulletin*.²⁵ The second, equally essential token is that a Petersburg Russian never uses the word "breakfast," but always says "Frühstück,"²⁶ putting special emphasis on the *Früh*. By these basic and distinctive tokens you can always distinguish them: in short, this is a humble type and was formed definitively over the last thirty-five years. However, Akim Petrovich was by no means a fool. Had the general asked him something appropriate for him, he would have replied and kept up the conversation, whereas it was quite unfitting for a subordinate to answer such questions, though Akim Petrovich was dying of curiosity to learn something more specific about His Excellency's real intentions ...

And meanwhile Ivan Ilyich was falling more and more into reverie and into a certain round of ideas; distracted, he imperceptibly but ceaselessly sipped from his glass. Akim Petrovich at once and most diligently poured more. Both were silent. Ivan Ilyich was beginning to watch the dancing, and soon it attracted his attention somewhat. Suddenly one circumstance even surprised him...

The dancing was indeed merry. Here people danced precisely in simplicity of heart, to make merry and even get wild. Among the dancers very few were adroit; but the non-adroit stomped so hard that they might have been taken for adroit. The officer distinguished himself above all: he especially liked the figures where he remained alone, as in a solo. Then he would bend himself amazingly—namely, standing straight as a milepost, he would suddenly lean to one side so that you would think he was about to fall over, but at the next step he would suddenly lean to the opposite side, at the same sharp angle to the floor. He maintained a most serious expression and danced with the full conviction that everyone was amazed at him. Another gentleman, after getting potted beforehand, prior to the quadrille, fell asleep beside his partner at the second figure, so that his lady had to dance alone. A young registrar, who was dancing away with the lady in the blue scarf, in all the figures and all five quadrilles that had been danced that evening, kept pulling one and the same stunt—namely, he would lag behind his partner a little, pick up the end of her scarf, and, in air, at the changing of partners, would manage to plant about twenty kisses on it. The lady would go sailing on ahead of him as if she noticed nothing. The medical student indeed performed a solo upside down and provoked furious rapture, stomping, and squeals of pleasure. In short, there was unconstraint in the extreme. Ivan Ilyich, in whom the wine was also having its effect, was beginning to smile, but gradually some bitter doubt began to creep into his soul: of course, he very much liked casualness and unconstraint; he had desired, his soul had even called for this casualness, as they were all backing away, but now this casualness was beginning to go beyond limits. One lady, for instance, wearing a shabby blue velvet dress, bought at fourth hand, pinned her skirt up for the sixth figure in such a way that it was as if she were wearing trousers. This was that same Kleopatra Semyonovna with whom one could risk anything, as her partner, the medical student, had put it. Of the medical student there was nothing else to say: simply Fokine.²⁷ How could it be? First they backed away, and then suddenly they got so quickly emancipated! It seemed like nothing, yet this transition was somehow strange: it foreboded something. As if they had totally forgotten there was any Ivan Ilyich in the world. Naturally, he was the first to laugh and he even risked applauding. Akim Petrovich deferentially chuckled in unison with him, though, by the way, with obvious pleasure and not suspecting that His Excellency was already beginning to nurse a new worm in his heart.

"You dance nicely, young man," Ivan Ilyich felt forced to say to the student as he was passing by: the quadrille had just ended.

The student turned sharply to him, pulled some sort of grimace, and, bringing his face indecently close to His Excellency's, gave a loud cock-crow. This was too much. Ivan Ilyich got up from the table. In spite of that, there followed a burst of irrepressible laughter, because the cock-crow was astonishingly natural, and the whole grimace was completely unexpected. Ivan Ilyich was still standing in perplexity when Pseldonymov himself suddenly came and, bowing, began inviting him to supper. After him came his mother.

"Your Excellency," she said, bowing, "do us the honor, dearie, don't scorn our poverty..."

"I... I really don't know..." Ivan Ilyich began, "it was not for this that I... I... was just about to leave..."

He was indeed holding his hat in his hand. Not only that: just then, at that very instant, he had given himself his word of honor that he would leave without fail, at once, whatever the cost, and that stay for anything, and... and he stayed. A minute later he was leading the procession to the table. Pseldonymov and his mother went ahead, clearing the way for him. He was seated in the place of honor, and again a full bottle of champagne appeared before him. There were appetizers: herring and vodka. He reached out, poured himself a huge glass of vodka, and drank it. He had never drunk vodka before. He felt as if he were tumbling down a mountain, falling, falling, falling, that he must hold on, get a grip on something, but there was no opportunity for that.

His position was indeed becoming more and more peculiar. Not only that: it was some sort of mockery of fate. God knows what had happened to him in one little hour. When he came in, he was, so to speak, opening his embrace to all mankind and all his subordinates; and here, before one little hour had passed, he felt and knew with all his aching heart that he hated Pseldonymov, cursed him, and his wife, and his wedding. Not only that: from his face, from his eyes alone, he could see that Pseldonymov also hated him, that his eyes were all but saying: "Go to blazes, curse you! Fastened yourself on my neck!..." All this he had long since read in his look.

Of course, even now, as he was sitting down at the table, Ivan Ilyich would sooner have let his hand be cut off than

admit sincerely, not only aloud, but even to himself, that all this was indeed exactly so. The moment had not yet fully come, and for now there was still a certain moral balance. But his heart, his heart... it was sick! it begged for freedom, air, rest. Ivan Ilyich was all too kindly a man.

He knew, he knew very well, that he should have left long ago, and not only so as to leave, but so as to save himself. That all this had suddenly become something else—well, had turned out totally unlike his dream on the planks that evening.

“Why did I come? Did I really come to eat and drink here?” he asked himself, munching on pickled herring. He even got into negation. There were moments when irony at his great deed stirred in his soul. He was even beginning not to understand himself why, in fact, he had come.

But how could he leave? To leave like that, without going through with it, was impossible. “What will people say? They’ll say I go dragging myself around to indecent places. In fact, it will even come out that way if I don’t go through with it. What, for instance, will be said tomorrow (because it will spread everywhere), by Stepan Nikiforovich, by Semyon Ivanych, in the offices, at the Shembels’, at the Shubins’? No, I must leave in such a way that they all understand why I came, I must reveal the moral purpose...” And meanwhile this touching moment refused to be caught. “They don’t even respect me,” he went on. “What are they laughing at? They’re so casual, as if unfeeling... Yes, I’ve long suspected the whole younger generation of being unfeeling! I must stay, whatever the cost!... They’ve just been dancing, but once they’ve gathered around the table... I’ll start talking about problems, about reforms, about Russia’s greatness... I’ll still get them carried away! Yes! Maybe absolutely nothing is lost yet... Maybe this is how it always is in reality. Only how shall I begin with them so as to attract them? What sort of method must I come up with? I’m at a loss, simply at a loss... And what do they want, what do they demand?... I see they’re laughing at something over there... Can it be at me, oh, Lord God! But what is it that I want... why am I here, why don’t I leave, what am I after?...” He thought this, and some sort of shame, some deep, unbearable shame wrung his heart more and more.

But it all went on that way, one thing after another.

Exactly two minutes after he sat down at the table, a dreadful thought took possession of his whole being. He suddenly felt that he was terribly drunk, that is, not as before, but definitively drunk. The cause of it was the glass of vodka, which, drunk on top of the champagne, produced an immediate effect. He felt, he sensed with his whole being, that he was definitively weakening. Of course, this greatly increased his bravado, yet consciousness did not abandon him, but cried out: “Not nice, not nice at all, and even quite indecent!” Of course, his unsteady, drunken thoughts could not settle on any one point: suddenly, even tangibly for himself, something like two sides appeared in him. On one was bravado, a yearning for victory, the overthrowing of obstacles, and a desperate conviction that he would still reach his goal. The other side made itself known to him by a tormenting ache in his soul and some gnawing at his heart. “What will people say? where will it end? what will tomorrow bring, tomorrow, tomorrow!...”

Earlier he had somehow vaguely sensed that he already had enemies among the guests. “That’s because I was drunk then, too,” he thought with tormenting doubt. What was his horror now, when he indeed became convinced, by indubitable signs, that he indeed had enemies at the table, and it was no longer possible to doubt it.

“And for what? for what?” he thought.

At this table all thirty guests were placed, some of whom were definitively done in. The others behaved with a certain nonchalant, malignant independence; they all shouted, talked loudly, offered premature toasts, fired bread balls with the ladies. One, a sort of uncomely person in a greasy frock coat, fell off his chair as soon as he sat at the table, and remained that way until the end of the supper. Another absolutely insisted on climbing onto the table and delivering a toast, and only the officer, who grabbed him by the coattails, restrained his premature enthusiasm. The supper was a perfect omniumgatherum, though a cook had been hired to prepare it, some general’s serf: there was a galantine, there was tongue with potatoes, there were meat cakes with green peas, there was, finally, a goose, and, to crown it all, blancmange. For drinks there were beer, vodka, and sherry. A bottle of champagne stood in front of the general alone, which forced him to pour for Akim Petrovich as well, since the man no longer dared use his own initiative at supper. For toasts the rest of the guests were meant to drink Georgian wine or whatever there happened to be. The table itself consisted of many tables put together, among them even a card table. It was covered with many tablecloths, including a colored Yaroslavl one. Gentlemen and ladies were seated alternately. Pseldonymov’s maternal parent did not want to sit at the table; she bustled about and gave orders. Instead there appeared a malignant female figure who had not made an appearance earlier, in a sort of reddish silk dress, with a bound cheek, and in the tallest of bonnets. As it turned out, this was the bride’s mother, who had finally agreed to come from the back room for supper. She had not come out till then on account of her implacable enmity for Pseldonymov’s mother; but of that we shall speak later. This lady looked spitefully, even mockingly, at the general, and apparently did not wish to be introduced to him. To Ivan Ilyich this figure seemed highly suspect. But, besides her, certain other persons were also suspect and inspired an involuntary apprehension and alarm. It even seemed that they were in some conspiracy among themselves, and precisely against Ivan Ilyich. At least it seemed so to him, and in the course of the supper he became more and more convinced of it. Namely: there was malignancy in one gentleman with a little beard, a free artist of some sort; he even glanced several times at Ivan Ilyich and then, turning to his neighbor, whispered something in his ear. Another, a student, was in truth already thoroughly drunk, but all the same was suspect by certain tokens. The medical student also boded ill. Even the officer himself was not altogether trustworthy. But an especial and obvious hatred shone from the collaborator on *The Firebrand*: he sprawled so in his chair, had such a proud and presumptuous air, snorted so independently! And though the rest of the guests did not pay any special attention to the collaborator, who had written only four little ditties for *The Firebrand*, thus becoming a liberal, and evidently even disliked him, still, when a bread ball suddenly fell next to Ivan Ilyich, obviously sent in his direction, he was ready to stake his head that the perpetrator of this bread ball was none other than the collaborator on *The Firebrand*.

All this, of course, affected him in a lamentable fashion.

Particularly disagreeable was yet another observation: Ivan Ilyich was fully convinced that he was beginning to

articulate words somehow unclearly and with difficulty, that he wanted to say a great deal, but his tongue would not move. Then, that he had suddenly begun as if to forget himself and, above all, out of the blue, would suddenly snort and laugh when there was nothing at all to laugh at. This disposition quickly passed after a glass of champagne, which Ivan Ilyich, though he had poured it for himself, had no wish to drink, but suddenly drank somehow quite accidentally. After this glass, he suddenly almost wanted to weep. He felt he was lapsing into the most peculiar sentimentality; he was beginning to love again, to love everybody, even Pseldonymov, even the collaborator on *The Firebrand*. He suddenly wanted to embrace them all, to forget everything and make peace. Not only that: to tell them everything frankly, everything, everything, that is, what a kind and nice man he was, with what excellent abilities. How he was going to be useful to the fatherland, how he was able to make the fair sex laugh, and, above all, what a progressist he was, how humanely he was prepared to condescend to everyone, to the most lowly, and, finally, in conclusion, to tell frankly the whole motive that had induced him to come, uninvited, to Pseldonymov's, drink two bottles of champagne, and overjoy them with his presence.

"The truth, the sacred truth first of all, and frankness! I'll get them with frankness. They'll believe me, I see it clearly; they even look hostile, but when I reveal everything to them, I'll subject them irresistibly. They'll fill their glasses and, with a shout, drink my health. The officer, I'm sure of it, will break his glass on his spur. There may even be a shout of 'hurrah!' Even if they should decide to toss me hussar fashion, I wouldn't resist, it would even be rather nice. I'll kiss the bride on the forehead; she's a sweetie. Akim Petrovich is also a very good man. Pseldonymov, of course, will improve in time. He lacks, so to speak, this worldly polish... And though, of course, this whole new generation lacks this delicacy of heart, but... but I'll tell them about the modern destiny of Russia among the other European powers. I'll mention the peasant question, too, yes, and... and they'll all love me, and I'll come out with glory!..."

These dreams were, of course, very pleasant, but the unpleasant thing was that amid all these rosy hopes Ivan Ilyich suddenly discovered in himself yet another unexpected ability: namely, spitting. At least the saliva suddenly began leaping from his mouth quite regardless of his will. He noticed it because Akim Petrovich, whose cheek he had sprayed, was sitting there not daring, out of deference, to wipe it off right away. Ivan Ilyich took a napkin and suddenly wiped it off himself. But this at once appeared so preposterous to him, so beyond anything reasonable, that he fell silent and began to be surprised. Akim Petrovich, though he had been drinking, sat all the same as if he were in shock. Ivan Ilyich now realized that, for almost a quarter of an hour already, he had been telling him about some most interesting topic, but that Akim Petrovich, while listening to him, was as if not only embarrassed, but even afraid of something. Pseldonymov, who was sitting two chairs away, also kept stretching his neck toward him, his head inclined to one side, listening with a most disagreeable air. He actually was as if keeping watch on him. Glancing around at the guests, he saw that many were looking straight at him and guffawing. But the strangest thing of all was that this did not embarrass him in the least; on the contrary, he sipped once more from his glass and suddenly started speaking for all to hear.

"I was saying!" he began as loudly as he could, "gentlemen, I was just saying to Akim Petrovich that Russia... yes, precisely Russia... in short, you understand what I mean to sa-sa-say... Russia, in my deepest conviction, experiences humaneness..."

"Hu-humaneness!" came from the other end of the table.

"Hu-hu!"

"Coo-coo!"

Ivan Ilyich paused. Pseldonymov rose from his chair and started peering: who had shouted? Akim Petrovich was covertly shaking his head, as if admonishing the guests. Ivan Ilyich noticed it very well, but painfully held his tongue.

"Humaneness!" he went on stubbornly. "And this evening... and precisely this evening I was saying to Stepan Niki-forovich... yes... that... that the renewal, so to speak, of things..."

"Your Excellency!" came loudly from the other end of the table.

"What can I do for you?" the interrupted Ivan Ilyich replied, trying to make out who had shouted.

"Precisely nothing, Your Excellency, I got carried away, please continue, con-tin-ue!" the voice came again.

Ivan Ilyich winced.

"The renewal, so to speak, of these very things..."

"Your Excellency!" the voice shouted again.

"What is it you want?"

"Hello there!"

This time Ivan Ilyich could not restrain himself. He interrupted his speech and turned to the offender and violator of order. This was a still very young student, totally crooked and arousing enormous suspicion. He had been hollering for a long time and even broke a glass and two plates, insisting that that was what was done at weddings. At the same moment that Ivan Ilyich turned to him, the officer began to reprimand the shouter sternly.

"What's with you, why are you hollering? You ought to be taken out, that's what!"

"It's not about you, Your Excellency, it's not about you! Do continue!" shouted the merrymaking schoolboy, sprawling on his chair. "Do continue, I'm listening and I'm very, ve-ry, ve-ry pleased with you! Pra-aiseworthy, pra-aiseworthy!"

"A drunken brat!" Pseldonymov prompted in a whisper.

"I can see he's drunk, but..."

"It's that I just told an amusing anecdote, Your Excellency!" the officer began. "About a certain lieutenant of our command, who had exactly that way of talking to superiors; so now he's imitating him. To every word of his superior, he would add: pra-aiseworthy, pra-aiseworthy! He was expelled from the service for it ten years ago."

"Wha-what lieutenant is that?"

"From our command, Your Excellency, he went mad over this praiseworthy. First they admonished him with milder measures, then they put him under arrest... His superior officer admonished him like a father; and all he said was: pra-aiseworthy, pra-aiseworthy! And it's strange: he was a courageous officer, six foot six. They wanted to court-martial him, but noticed that he was crazy."

"Meaning... a prankster. For prankishness they shouldn't be so severe... I, for my part, am ready to forgive..."

"There was medical evidence, Your Excellency."

"What! an autopsy?"

"Good heavens, he was perfectly alive, sir."

A loud and almost general burst of laughter came from the guests, who in the beginning had behaved themselves decorously. Ivan Ilyich became furious.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" he cried, at first almost without stammering, "I am quite well able to distinguish that autopsies are not performed on the living. I thought that in his madness he was no longer living... that is, already dead... that is, already dead... that is, I mean to say... that you don't love me... And yet I love you all... yes, and I love Por... Porfiry... I humiliate myself by saying so..."

At that moment an enormous spit flew out of Ivan Ilyich's mouth and spattered on the tablecloth in a most conspicuous place. Pseldonymov rushed to wipe it up with his napkin. This last disaster finally crushed him.

"Gentlemen, this is too much!" he cried out in despair.

"A drunk man, Your Excellency," Pseldonymov prompted again.

"Porfiry! I see that you... all... yes! I say that I hope... yes, I challenge you all to say: how have I humiliated myself?"

Ivan Ilyich was on the verge of tears.

"Your Excellency, good heavens, sir!"

"Porfiry, I turn to you... Say, if I came... yes... yes, to the wedding, I had a goal. I wanted to morally uplift... I wanted them to feel. I address you all: am I very humiliated in your eyes, or not?"

Deathly silence. That was just the thing, that there was deathly silence, and to such a categorical question. "Why, why don't they cry out at least at such a moment!" flashed in His Excellency's head. But the guests only exchanged looks. Akim Petrovich was sitting there more dead than alive, and Pseldonymov, numb with fear, repeated to himself a terrible question, which had already presented itself to him long before:

"What am I going to get for all this tomorrow?"

Suddenly the already very drunk collaborator on *The Firebrand*, who had been sitting in glum silence, addressed Ivan Ilyich directly and, his eyes flashing, began to reply on behalf of the whole company.

"Yes, sir!" he cried in a thundering voice, "yes, sir, you've humiliated yourself, yes, sir, you're a retrograde... Re-tro-grade!"

"Young man, come to your senses! To whom, as it were, are you speaking!" Ivan Ilyich cried furiously, again jumping up from his seat.

"To you, and, secondly, I'm not a young man... You came to show off and seek popularity."

"Pseldonymov, what is it!" cried Ivan Ilyich.

But Pseldonymov jumped up in such horror that he stood like a post and absolutely did not know what to start doing. The guests, too, froze in their places. The artist and the student were applauding and shouting, "Bravo, bravo!"

The collaborator went on shouting with irrepressible rage:

"Yes, you came to flaunt your humaneness! You interfered with everybody's merrymaking. You drank champagne without realizing that it was too expensive for a clerk who makes ten roubles a month, and I suspect that you're one of those superiors who relish their subordinates' young wives! Not only that, I'm convinced that you're in favor of tax-farming... Yes, yes, yes!"

"Pseldonymov, Pseldonymov!" Ivan Ilyich cried, holding his arms out to him. He felt that each of the collaborator's words was like a new dagger in his heart.

"Wait, Your Excellency, kindly do not worry!" Pseldonymov cried out energetically, jumped over to the collaborator, grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, and pulled him away from the table. It was even impossible to expect such physical strength from the scrawny Pseldonymov. But the collaborator was very drunk, and Pseldonymov perfectly sober. Then he gave him several whacks on the back and chucked him out the door.

"You're all scoundrels!" the collaborator cried. "By tomorrow I'll make caricatures of you all in *The Firebrand*!..."

They all jumped up from their seats.

"Your Excellency, Your Excellency!" cried Pseldonymov, his mother, and some of the guests, crowding around the general. "Calm yourself, Your Excellency!"

"No, no!" cried the general, "I'm destroyed... I came... I wanted, so to speak, to baptize. And look here, for all that, for all that!"

He sank onto the chair as if unconscious, put both hands on the table, and lowered his head to them, right into a dish of blancmange. No need to describe the universal horror. A minute later he rose, as if wishing to leave, staggered, tripped against the leg of a chair, fell flat on the floor, and started snoring ...

This happens to non-drinkers when they accidentally get drunk. To the last stroke, to the last instant they remain conscious, and then suddenly fall as if cut down. Ivan Ilyich lay on the floor, having lost all consciousness. Pseldonymov seized himself by the hair and froze in that position. The guests hastily began to depart, each discussing in his own way what had happened. It was about three o'clock in the morning.

The main thing was that Pseldonymov's situation was much worse than could have been imagined, quite apart from the whole attractiveness of the present circumstances. And while Ivan Ilyich is lying on the floor, with Pseldonymov standing over him, desperately tugging himself by the hair, let us interrupt the chosen current of our story and give a few words of explanation about Porfiry Petrovich Pseldonymov himself.

Still as recently as a month before his marriage, he was perishing quite irretrievably. He came from the provinces, where his father had once served as something and where he had died while under prosecution. When, some five months before the wedding, after perishing for a whole year in Petersburg, Pseldonymov got his ten-rouble post, he was resurrected in body and spirit, but circumstances soon laid him low again. In the whole world there remained only two Pseldonymovs, he and his mother, who had left the provinces after her husband's death. Mother and son were perishing together in the cold and feeding on doubtful substances. There were days when Pseldonymov took a mug and went to the

Fontanka himself to fetch water, which he also drank there. Having obtained his post, he and his mother somehow settled themselves in corners somewhere. She began taking in laundry, and he knocked together some savings over four months, so as somehow to provide himself with boots and a bit of an overcoat. And how much grief he endured in his office: his superiors would approach him asking him if it was long since he had taken a bath. There was a rumor that he had nests of bedbugs thriving under the collar of his uniform. But Pseldonymov was a man of firm character. In appearance, he was quiet and placid; he had very little education, and hardly ever was any conversation heard from him. I do not know positively whether he thought, made plans and systems, or dreamed of anything. But instead he was developing some instinctive, deep-seated, unconscious resolve to make his way out of his nasty situation. There was an antlike persistence in him: destroy an anthill and they will immediately start rebuilding it, destroy it again—again they will rebuild it, and so on without tiring. This was a nest-building and domestic being. One could see written on his brow that he would find his way, make his nest, and perhaps even put something aside. His mother alone in the whole world loved him and loved him to distraction. She was a firm, tireless, hardworking woman, and kind besides. They would just have gone on living in their corners for another five or six years, until circumstances changed, had they not run into the retired titular councillor Mlekopitaev, who had been a treasurer serving somewhere in the provinces, but had recently moved to Petersburg and settled there with his family. He knew Pseldonymov and had once owed something to his father. He had a bit of money, not much, of course, but he did have it; how much there was in reality—of this no one knew anything, neither his wife, nor his elder daughter, nor his relations. He had two daughters, and since he was a terrible despot, a drunkard, a domestic tyrant, and ailing besides, he suddenly took a notion to marry one daughter to Pseldonymov: “I know him,” he said, “the father was a good man, and the son will be a good man.” Whatever Mlekopitaev wanted, he did; no sooner said than done. He was a very strange despot. He spent most of his time sitting in his armchair, some illness having deprived him of the use of his legs, though that did not prevent him from drinking vodka. He drank and swore the whole day long. He was a wicked man; he absolutely had to torment someone constantly. For that he kept several distant female relations around him: his own sister, ailing and shrewish; his wife’s two sisters, also wicked and multiloquent; and then his old aunt, who had broken a rib on some occasion. He kept yet another sponger, a Russified German woman, for her talent in telling him tales from *The Thousand and One Nights*. All his pleasure consisted in picking on these unfortunate hangers-on, cursing them constantly and seven ways to Sunday, though none of them, including his wife, who had been born with a toothache, dared to make a peep before him. He got them to quarrel among themselves, invented and fomented gossip and strife among them, and afterward guffawed and rejoiced seeing how they all nearly came to blows among themselves. He was overjoyed when his elder daughter, who for about ten years had lived in poverty with some officer, her husband, was finally widowed and moved in with him, bringing three small, ailing children. Her children he could not stand, but since their appearance increased the material on which his daily experiments could be conducted, the old man was very pleased. This whole heap of wicked women and ailing children, together with their tormentor, crowded into a wooden house on the Petersburg side, not eating enough, because the old man was miserly and handed out money by kopecks, though he did not stint on his vodka; not sleeping enough, because the old man suffered from insomnia and demanded to be entertained. In short, the whole thing lived in poverty and cursed its fate. It was at this time that Mlekopitaev sought out Pseldonymov. He was struck by his long nose and humble look. His puny and homely younger daughter had then turned seventeen. Though she had once attended some German *Schule*, she had not learned much more in it than the rudiments. After that, she grew up, scrofulous and sapless, under the crutch of her lame and drunken parent, amid a bedlam of household gossip, spying, and calumny. She never had any girlfriends, or any intelligence. She had long been wishing to get married. With other people she was silent, but at home, by her mummy and the spongers, she was wicked and piercing as a little drill. She particularly liked pinching and dealing out swats to her sister’s children, peaching on them for stolen sugar or bread, which caused an endless and unquenchable quarrel between her and her elder sister. The old man himself offered her to Pseldonymov. But he, wretched though he was, nevertheless asked for some time to reflect. He and his mother pondered long together. But the house was to be registered in the bride’s name, and though it was wooden, though it was one-storied and disgusting, it was still worth something. On top of that came four hundred roubles—when would he ever save up so much! “Why am I taking a man into my house?” the drunken tyrant shouted. “First, since you’re all females, and I’m sick of just females. I want Pseldonymov to dance to my music, too, because I’m his benefactor. Second, I’m taking him, because you all don’t want it and you’re angry. So I’ll do it just to spite you. What I’ve said I’ll do, I’ll do! And you, Porfirka, beat her when she’s your wife; she’s had seven demons sitting in her since the day she was born. Drive them all out, I’ll even get the stick ready...”

Pseldonymov kept silent, but he had already decided. He and his mother were received into the house still prior to the wedding, washed, clothed, shod, given money for the wedding. The old man patronized them, perhaps precisely because the whole family spited them. He even liked the old Pseldonymov woman, so he restrained himself and did not pick on her. However, Pseldonymov himself he made dance the Little Cossack²⁸ for him a week before the wedding. “Well, enough, I just wanted to make sure you don’t forget yourself with me,” he said when the dance was finished. He gave just enough money for the wedding and invited all his relations and acquaintances. On Pseldonymov’s side there were only the collaborator on *The Firebrand* and Akim Petrovich, the guest of honor. Pseldonymov knew very well that the bride loathed him and that she would much rather be marrying an officer and not him. But he endured it all, for such was his arrangement with his mother. The whole day of the wedding and the whole evening the old man spent drinking and cursing in nasty language. The whole family, on account of the wedding, huddled in the back rooms, which were crowded to the point of stinking. The front rooms were reserved for the ball and the supper. Finally, when the old man fell asleep, completely drunk, at around eleven o’clock in the evening, the bride’s mother, who had been especially angry with Pseldonymov’s mother that day, decided to exchange her wrath for mercy and come out for the ball and the supper. Ivan Ilyich’s appearance upset everything. Mrs. Mlekopitaev became embarrassed, offended, and began accusing them of not warning her that a general had been invited. They assured her that he had come on his own, uninvited—she was so stupid that she refused to believe it. Champagne was necessary. Pseldonymov’s mother had only one rouble, Pseldonymov himself—not a kopeck. They had to bow and scrape before the wicked old Mlekopitaev woman, begging money for one bottle, then for another. They pictured future official relations for her, the career, trying to bring her to reason. She

finally gave her own money, but she made Pseldonymov drink such a cup of gall and vinegar²⁹ that he ran more than once into the little room where the nuptial bed had been prepared, seized himself silently by the hair, and threw himself headfirst onto the bed destined for paradisaical delights, all atremble with impotent rage. No! Ivan Ilyich did not know the cost of the two bottles of Jackson he had drunk that night. What was Pseldonymov's horror, anguish, and even despair, when the business with Ivan Ilyich ended in so unexpected a way! Again there was going to be a fuss, and maybe a whole night of shrieking and tears from the capricious bride, and reproaches from her muddleheaded relations. He already had a headache without that, already without that the fumes and darkness clouded his eyes. And now Ivan Ilyich needed help, they had to look for a doctor or a carriage at three o'clock in the morning, to take him home, and it must be a carriage, not a hired hack, because it was impossible for such a person, and in such a state, to be sent home in a cab. And where find money at least for the carriage? The Mlekopitaev woman, infuriated that the general had not said even two words to her, nor so much as glanced at her during supper, announced that she did not have a kopeck. And perhaps she really did not have a kopeck. Where to find the money? What to do? Yes, he did have cause for pulling his hair.

Meanwhile, Ivan Ilyich was moved temporarily to a small leather sofa that stood right there in the dining room. While they were clearing and separating the tables, Pseldonymov rushed to all corners to borrow money, even tried borrowing from the servants, but no one turned out to have anything. He even risked troubling Akim Petrovich, who stayed longer than the others. But he, though he was a good man, became so bewildered and even frightened at the mention of money, that he came out with the most unexpected rubbish.

"At some other time, it would be my pleasure," he mumbled, "but now... really, you must excuse me..."

And, taking his hat, he quickly fled the house. Only the kindhearted youth who had told about the book of dreams proved good for anything, and inopportunely at that. He, too, stayed longer than the rest, taking a heartfelt interest in Pseldonymov's calamities. Finally, Pseldonymov, his mother, and the youth decided in general council not to send for a doctor, but rather to send for a carriage to take the sick man home, and meanwhile, before the carriage, to try some household remedies on him, such as wetting his temples and head with cold water, putting ice on the top of his head, and the like. This was undertaken by Pseldonymov's mother. The youth flew off to look for the carriage. Since at that hour there were not even any hacks on the Petersburg side, he set off for a carriage stand somewhere far away, where he woke up the coachmen. They started bargaining, saying that at such an hour even five roubles would not be enough to charge for a carriage. They settled, however, for three. But when, at almost four o'clock, the youth arrived at Pseldonymov's in the hired carriage, their decision had long since been changed. It turned out that Ivan Ilyich, who was still unconscious, had become so ill, was groaning and tossing so much, that to move him and take him home in such condition became completely impossible and even risky. "What will come of it?" said the completely discouraged Pseldonymov. What was to be done? A new question arose. If the sick man was to be kept at home, where was he to be moved to and where was he to be put? In the whole house there were only two beds: one huge double bed on which old man Mlekopitaev slept with his spouse, and another, newly purchased, with walnut veneer, also a double bed, intended for the newlyweds. All the other inhabitants, or, better to say, female inhabitants, of the house slept on the floor beside each other, mostly on featherbeds, but rather worn-out and malodorous ones, that is, altogether indecent, and of these there were barely enough; or not even that. Where, then, to put the sick man? They might, perhaps, produce a featherbed—they could pull one out from under somebody as a last resort, but where, and upon what, to put it? It turned out that it would have to be put in the big room, because it was farthest removed from the depth of the family and had its own separate exit. But what to put it on? surely not on chairs? It is known that beds are made up on chairs only for boarding-school students when they come home on Saturday to stay overnight, but for such a person as Ivan Ilyich it would be very disrespectful. What would he say the next morning, seeing himself on some chairs? Pseldonymov would not hear of it. One thing remained: to move him to the nuptial bed. This nuptial bed, as we have already mentioned, was set up in a small room just next to the dining room. On the bed was an as yet unused, newly purchased double mattress, clean linen, four pillows covered in pink calico, and, over that, muslin pillowcases trimmed with ruche. The coverlet was of satin, pink, with a quilted pattern. From a golden ring above, muslin curtains hung down. In short, everything was as it ought to be, and the guests, almost all of whom had visited the bedroom, had praised the furnishings. The bride, though she could not stand Pseldonymov, had nevertheless run over several times during the evening, especially, on the sly, to have a peek. What was her indignation, her anger, when she learned that they wanted to put on her nuptial bed a man sick with something like cholera! The bride's mama tried to intercede for her, cursing, vowing to complain to her husband the next day; but Pseldonymov showed his mettle and insisted: Ivan Ilyich was moved, and the bed for the newlyweds was made up in the drawing room on chairs. The young woman sniveled, was ready to start pinching, but dared not disobey: her papa had a stick she was very well acquainted with, and she knew that the next day her papa was sure to demand a detailed account of a certain something. To comfort her, the pink coverlet and the pillows in pink cases were moved to the drawing room. At that moment the youth arrived with the carriage; on learning that the carriage was no longer needed, he became terribly frightened. He had to pay for it himself, and he had never yet had even ten kopecks. Pseldonymov declared his total bankruptcy. They tried to reason with the driver. But he started making noise and even rapped on the shutters. How it ended, I do not know in detail. It seems the youth went in the carriage as a hostage to Peski,³⁰ to the Fourth Rozhdestvensky Street, where he hoped to awaken some student who was spending the night with his acquaintances and see if he might not have some money. It was already past four in the morning when the young couple was left alone and the door of the room was closed. Pseldonymov's mother stayed at the sufferer's bedside all night. She huddled on the floor, on a little rug, and covered herself with a fur jacket, but was unable to sleep, because she was forced to get up every moment: Ivan Ilyich had a terribly upset stomach. Mrs. Pseldonymov, a courageous and magnanimous woman, undressed him herself, took off all his clothes, looked after him as after her own son, and spent the whole night carrying the necessary vessels from the bedroom to the corridor and back again. And yet the disasters of this night were far from over.

Ten minutes had not passed since the young couple was shut in the drawing room, when a rending cry was suddenly heard, a cry not of joy, but of a most malignant quality. The cries were followed by a noise, a crash, as of the falling of chairs, and instantly, into the still dark room, there unexpectedly burst a whole crowd of gasping and frightened women in all possible dishabille. These women were: the bride's mother, her elder sister, who for the time had abandoned her ailing children, her three aunts, even the one with the broken rib came padding in. Even the cook was there, even the sponging German woman who told fairy tales, from under whom her own featherbed had been pulled by force for the newlyweds, which was the best one in the house and constituted her entire property, came padding in along with the rest. All these respectable and perspicacious women had already stolen on tiptoe from the kitchen to the corridor some quarter of an hour earlier, and were eavesdropping in the anteroom, consumed by the most inexplicable curiosity. Meanwhile someone quickly lighted a candle, and they all beheld an unexpected sight. The chairs, unable to bear the double weight and supporting the heavy featherbed only on the edges, had slid apart, and the featherbed had fallen on the floor between them. The young woman was sniveling with anger; this time she was offended to the heart. The morally crushed Pseldonymov stood like a criminal caught in his evil-doing. He did not even try to justify himself. Gasps and shrieks came from all sides. Pseldonymov's mother also came running at the noise, but this time the bride's mummy was fully on top of things. First she showered Pseldonymov with strange and for the most part unjust reproaches on the theme of "What kind of husband are you after that, my dear? What are you good for, my dear, after such shame?" and so on, and finally, taking her daughter by the hand, she drew her from her husband to her own room, taking upon herself personally the next day's responsibility before the terrible father when he called for an account. Everyone cleared out after her, saying "ah" and wagging their heads. Only his mother stayed with Pseldonymov and tried to comfort him. But he immediately drove her away from him.

He could not be bothered with comforting. He made his way to the sofa and sat down in the gloomiest pondering, barefoot as he was and in only the most necessary underwear. Thoughts crossed and tangled in his head. At times, as if mechanically, he glanced around this room where so recently there had been wild dancing and where cigarette smoke still hung in the air. Cigarette butts and candy wrappers were still lying on the spilt-upon and dirtied floor. The wreckage of the nuptial bed and the overturned chairs testified to the frailty of the best and surest of earthly hopes and dreams. He went on sitting like that for nearly an hour. Heavy thoughts kept coming into his head, as for example: what now awaited him at work? He was painfully aware that he had to change his place of work at all costs, and that it was impossible to remain at his former place, precisely owing to all that had happened that evening. He also thought about Mlekopitaev, who, perhaps the very next day, would make him dance the Little Cossack again, in order to test his meekness. He also realized that, though Mlekopitaev had given him fifty roubles for the wedding day, which had been spent to the last kopeck, he had not yet dreamed of giving him the four hundred roubles of the dowry, there had not been any mention of it. And the house itself had not yet been formally transferred. He also thought about his wife, who had abandoned him at the most critical moment of his life, about the tall officer who had gone on one knee before her—he had managed to notice that. He thought about the seven demons who were sitting in his wife, by her father's own testimony, and about the stick ready to drive them out... Of course, he felt strong enough to endure a lot, but fate kept slipping in such surprises as could make one finally doubt one's strength.

Thus Pseldonymov grieved. Meanwhile the candle-end was going out. Its glimmering light, falling directly on Pseldonymov's profile, reproduced him in colossal form on the wall, with outstretched neck, hooked nose, and two wisps of hair sticking up from his crown and forehead. Finally, when morning's freshness was already wafting, he got up, chilled and benumbed of soul, made his way to the featherbed lying between the chairs, and, not straightening anything, not blowing out the candle-end, not even putting a pillow under his head, crawled onto it on all fours and fell into that dead, leaden sleep that must be the sleep of those sentenced to civil execution the next day.

On the other hand, what could compare with the painful night Ivan Ilyich Pralinsky spent on the nuptial bed of the unfortunate Pseldonymov! For some time the headache, vomiting, and other most unpleasant attacks would not leave him for a minute. These were the torments of hell. Consciousness, though barely flickering in his head, lit up such abysses of horror, such dismal and loathsome pictures, that it would have been better not to regain consciousness. However, everything was still mixed up in his head. He recognized Pseldonymov's mother, for instance—heard her gentle admonishments, such as: "Be patient, dovey, be patient, my dear, nothing ventured, nothing gained"—recognized her and yet was unable to give himself any logical account of her presence at his side. Loathsome phantoms pictured themselves to him: most often it was Semyon Ivanych, but, on closer inspection, he noticed that this was not Semyon Ivanych at all, it was Pseldonymov's nose. Before him also flitted the free artist, and the officer, and the old woman with the bound cheek. Most of all he was preoccupied with the golden ring that hung over his head, from which the curtains came. He made it out clearly by the dim light of a candle-end, and kept seeking mentally: what is the purpose of this ring, why is it there, what does it signify? He asked the old woman about it several times, but obviously did not say what he meant to say, and she evidently did not understand him, no matter how he sought to explain. Finally, toward morning, his attacks ceased, and he fell asleep, fast asleep, without dreams. He slept for about an hour, and when he woke up, he was already almost fully conscious, feeling an unbearable ache in his head, and in his mouth, on his tongue, which had turned into some piece of flannel, the foulest taste. He sat up in bed, looked around, and fell to thinking. The pale light of the dawning day, stealing in narrow strips through the cracks in the blinds, trembled on the wall. It was about seven o'clock in the morning. But when Ivan Ilyich suddenly realized and recalled all that had happened to him since evening; when he recalled all the adventures at supper, his miscarried great deed, his speech at the table; when he imagined all at once, with horrifying clarity, all that might come of it now, all that would now be said and thought about him; when he looked around and saw, finally, to what a sad and hideous state he had brought the peaceful nuptial bed of his subordinate—oh, then such mortal shame, such torment descended suddenly into his heart, that he cried out, covered his face with his hands, and in despair threw himself down on the pillow. A moment later he jumped out of bed, saw his clothes right there on a chair, properly folded and already cleaned, grabbed them, and quickly, hurrying, looking over his shoulder and terribly afraid of something, began pulling them on. Right there on the other chair lay his fur coat, and his hat, and

in the hat his yellow gloves. He was about to slip away quietly. But the door suddenly opened and old Mrs. Pseldonymov came in with an earthenware bowl and a washstand. On her shoulder hung a towel. She set the washstand down and, without further talk, announced that it was absolutely necessary to wash.

"Come now, dearie, wash yourself, you can't go without washing..."

And at that moment Ivan Ilyich realized that if there was at least one being in the whole world of whom he now could neither be ashamed nor afraid, it was precisely this old woman. He washed himself. And for a long time afterward, in difficult moments of his life, he recalled, amid other pangs of conscience, all the circumstances of this awakening, this earthenware bowl with the faience washstand, filled with cold water in which pieces of ice still floated, and the soap in its pink wrapper, of an oval shape, with some letters stamped on it, fifteen kopecks' worth, obviously bought for the newlyweds, but of which Ivan Ilyich was to be the first user; and the old woman with the damask towel on her left shoulder. The cold water refreshed him, he dried himself off, and, without saying a word, not even thanking his sister of mercy, seized his hat, took on his shoulders the fur coat held for him by Mrs. Pseldonymov, and through the corridor, through the kitchen, where the cat was already miaowing and the cook, raising herself on her pallet, gazed after him with greedy curiosity, ran out to the courtyard, to the street, and rushed for a passing cab. The morning was frosty, a chilled yellowish fog still enveloped the houses and all objects. Ivan Ilyich turned up his collar. He thought that everyone was watching him, that everyone knew him, that everyone recognized him...

For eight days he did not leave his house or go to work. He was ill, painfully ill, but more morally than physically. In those eight days he lived through an entire hell, and they must have been counted to his credit in the other world. There were moments when he would start thinking about becoming a monk. There really were. His imagination would even run particularly free on those occasions. He pictured quiet underground singing, an open coffin,³¹ life in a secluded cell, forests and caves; but, coming to his senses, he would realize almost at once that all this was the most terrible nonsense and exaggeration, and he was ashamed of this nonsense. Then moral fits began, concerned with his *existence manquée*. Then shame again flared up in his soul, taking possession of it all at once, burning and exacerbating everything. He shuddered, imagining various pictures to himself. What would they say about him, what would they think, how would he enter the office, what whispering would pursue him for a whole year, for ten years, all his life? His anecdote would be handed down to posterity. Sometimes he even lapsed into such faintheartedness that he was ready to go at once to Semyon Ivanych and beg for his forgiveness and friendship. Himself he did not even try to justify, he blamed himself definitively: he found no justifications for himself and was ashamed of them.

He also thought of taking his retirement immediately and thus, simply, in solitude, devoting himself to the happiness of mankind. In any case, he certainly had to change all his acquaintances and in such fashion as to eradicate any memory of himself. Then the thought came to him that this was all nonsense and that through increased strictness with his subordinates the whole thing could still be mended. Then he would begin to have hope and take courage. Finally, after a whole eight days of doubt and torment had passed, he felt he could endure the uncertainty no longer, and *un beau matin*³² he decided to go to the office.

Before, when he was still sitting at home, in anguish, he had imagined a thousand times how he would enter his office. He was convinced, to his horror, that he was sure to hear ambiguous whispers behind his back, to see ambiguous faces, to reap the most malignant smiles. What was his amazement when none of it in fact happened. He was met deferentially; he was bowed to; everyone was serious; everyone was busy. Joy filled his heart as he made his way to his inner office.

He at once and most seriously got down to business, listened to some reports and explanations, made decisions. He felt he had never yet reasoned and decided so intelligently, so efficiently, as that morning. He saw that people were pleased with him, honored him, treated him with respect. The most ticklish insecurity would have been unable to notice anything. Business went splendidly.

Finally Akim Petrovich also appeared with some papers. At his appearance something as if stung Ivan Ilyich in his very heart, but only for an instant. He got busy with Akim Petrovich, talked gravely, showed him what needed to be done, and gave explanations. He noticed only that he as if avoided looking at Akim Petrovich for too long, or, better to say, that Akim Petrovich was afraid to look at him. But then Akim Petrovich was finished and began to gather up the papers.

"And here is another petition," he began as dryly as he could, "from the clerk Pseldonymov, about his transfer to the —department. His Excellency Semyon Ivanovich Shipulenko has promised him a post. He asks your gracious assistance, Your Excellency."

"Ah, so he's transferring," Ivan Ilyich said, and felt an enormous weight lift from his heart. He looked at Akim Petrovich, and at that moment their eyes met.

"Why, then I, for my part... I will employ," Ivan Ilyich replied, "I am prepared."

Akim Petrovich obviously wanted to slip away quickly. He decided to speak himself out definitively. Apparently inspiration had come over him again.

"Tell him," he began, directing a clear and profoundly meaningful look at Akim Petrovich, "tell Pseldonymov that I wish him no evil; no, I do not!... That, on the contrary, I am even ready to forget all the past, to forget all, all..."

But suddenly Ivan Ilyich stopped short, staring in amazement at the strange behavior of Akim Petrovich, who from a sensible man suddenly turned out, for some reason, to be a most terrible fool. Instead of listening and hearing him out, he suddenly blushed to the point of ultimate stupidity, began bowing somehow hastily and even indecently with some sort of little bows and at the same time backing toward the door. His whole look expressed a wish to fall through the floor, or, better to say, to get quickly back to his desk. Ivan Ilyich, left alone, rose from his chair in perplexity. He was looking into the mirror without noticing his own face.

"No, strictness, strictness, strictness alone!" he was whispering to himself almost unconsciously, and suddenly bright color poured all down his face. He suddenly felt so ashamed, so distressed, as he had not felt in the most unbearable moments of his eight-day illness. "I didn't hold out!" he said to himself, and sank weakly into his chair.

BOBOK

NOTES OF A CERTAIN PERSON

THIS TIME I am including the “Notes of a Certain Person.”¹ It is not I; it is an entirely different person. I think there is no need for any further preface.

Semyon Ardalyonovich hands me this the other day: “But, pray tell me, Ivan Ivanych, will you ever be sober?”

A strange demand. I’m not offended, I’m a timid man; but, anyhow, now they’ve made a madman out of me. An artist had occasion to paint my portrait. “After all,” he says, “you’re a writer.” I yielded; he exhibited it. I read: “Go look at this morbid, nearly crazy person.”

Maybe it’s so, but still, why come right out with it in print? In print we need everything noble; we need ideals, but this...

At least say it indirectly, that’s what you have style for. No, he no longer wants it indirect. Nowadays humor and good style are disappearing, and abuse is taken for wit. I’m not offended: God knows I’m not such a writer as to lose my mind over it. I wrote a story—it wasn’t published. I wrote a feuilleton—it was rejected. I took a lot of these feuilletons to various editorial offices, they were rejected everywhere: you lack salt, they said.

“What kind of salt do you want,” I ask mockingly, “Attic salt?”²

He doesn’t even understand. I mainly translate from the French for booksellers. I also write advertisements for merchants: “A rarity!” I say. “Red tea from our own plantations...” I made a pile on a panegyric for His Excellency the late Pyotr Matveevich. I put together *The Art of Pleasing the Ladies* on commission from a bookseller. I’ve turned out about six such books in my life. I want to make a collection of Voltaire’s *bons mots*,³ but I’m afraid it might seem insipid to the likes of us. What’s Voltaire now! These days it’s the cudgel, not Voltaire! They’ve knocked the last teeth out of each other! So that’s the whole of my literary activity. Except that I also send letters to editors gratis, over my full signature. I keep giving admonishments and advice, I criticize and show the way. Last week I sent my fortieth letter to an editor in two years; four roubles on postage alone. I have a nasty character, that’s what.

I think the artist painted me not for the sake of literature, but for the sake of the two symmetrical warts on my forehead: a phenomenon, they say. They have no ideas, so now they trade on phenomena. And how well my warts came out in this portrait—to the life! This they call realism.

Regarding craziness, last year they set down a lot of people as madmen. And in what style! “With such a singular talent...” they say, “and look what came of it in the end... however, it should have been foreseen long ago...” Still, this is rather clever; so that from the point of pure art it can even be praised. Well, but they’ve suddenly come back smarter still. Now, to drive someone mad is possible with us, but they’ve never yet made anyone smarter.

The smartest one, in my opinion, is the one who calls himself a fool at least once a month—an unheard-of ability nowadays! Formerly, in any case, a fool knew at least once a year that he was a fool, but now unh-unh! And they’ve confused things so much that you can’t tell a fool from a smart man. They’ve done it on purpose.

I’m reminded of a Spanish joke, how the French built themselves the first madhouse two and a half centuries ago: “They locked up all their fools in a special house, to show what smart people they were themselves.” That’s just it: by locking someone else up in a madhouse, you don’t prove how smart you are. “K. has lost his wits, that means we’re the smart ones now.” No, it doesn’t quite mean that.

Anyhow, the devil... and what am I doing pothering over my own wits: grumble, grumble. Even the maid is sick of me. A friend stopped by yesterday: “Your style is changing,” he says, “it’s getting choppy. You chop and chop—then an inserted phrase, then a phrase inserted in the inserted phrase, then you stick in something in parentheses, and then you go back to chopping, chopping...”

My friend is right. Something strange is happening to me. My character is changing, and my head is aching. I’ve begun seeing and hearing some strange things. Not really voices, but as if there were someone just nearby: “Bobok, bobok, bobok!”

What is this bobok? I need some diversion.

I went out for diversion and wound up in a funeral. A distant relative. A collegiate councillor, however. A widow, five daughters, all young girls. The shoes alone, just think what that will add up to! The deceased used to provide, but now—a wretched little pension. They’ll have their tails between their legs. They always gave me a cool reception. I wouldn’t have gone now, either, if it hadn’t been for this urgent occasion. I went to the cemetery along with the others; they snubbed me and put on airs. My uniform is indeed a bit shabby.⁴ It’s a good twenty-five years, I think, since I’ve been to the cemetery; a nice little place!

First of all, the odor. About fifteen dead people arrived. Palls of various prices; there were even two catafalques: for a general, and for some lady. A lot of mournful faces, a lot of sham mourning, a lot of outright merriment. The clergy can’t complain: it’s a living. But the odor, the odor. I wouldn’t wish it on myself even for the odor of sanctity.

I peeked cautiously into the dead men’s faces, not trusting my impressionability. Some of the expressions are soft, some unpleasant. Generally, the smiles are not nice, and in some even very much so. I don’t like them; they visit my dreams.

During the liturgy I stepped out of church for some air; the day was grayish but dry. Cold, too; but then, it's October. I strolled among the little graves. Various classes. The third class costs thirty roubles: decent and not so expensive. The first two are inside the church and under the porch; now, that's a bit stiff. This time some six people were buried third class, the general and the lady among them.

I peeked into the graves—terrible: water, and such water! Absolutely green and... well, never mind! The grave digger was constantly bailing it out with a scoop. While the service was going on, I went for a walk outside the gates. There was an almshouse just there, and a little farther on a restaurant. A so-so restaurant, not bad: you can have a bite and all. A lot of mourners were packed in there. I noticed a lot of merriment and genuine animation. I had a bite and a drink.

After that I took part with my own hands in carrying the coffin from the church to the grave. Why is it that the dead become so heavy in their coffins? They say it's from some sort of inertia, that the body supposedly is no longer controlled by its own... or some such rubbish; it contradicts mechanics and common sense. I don't like it when people with only a general education among us set about resolving special questions; and it's rife among us. Civilians love discussing military subjects, even a field marshal's, and people with an engineer's education reason mainly about philosophy and political economy.

I didn't go to the wake. I'm proud, and if they receive me only out of urgent necessity, why drag myself to their dinners, even funeral ones? Only I don't understand why I stayed at the cemetery; I sat on a tombstone and lapsed appropriately into thought.

I began with the Moscow exhibition,⁵ and ended with astonishment, generally speaking, as a theme. About "astonishment," here is what I came up with:

"To be astonished at everything is, of course, stupid, while to be astonished at nothing is much more beautiful and for some reason is recognized as good tone. But it is hardly so in essence. In my opinion, to be astonished at nothing is much stupider than to be astonished at everything. And besides: to be astonished at nothing is almost the same as to respect nothing. And a stupid man even cannot respect."

"But I wish first of all to respect. I *yearn* to respect," an acquaintance of mine said to me once, the other day.

He yearns to respect! And God, I thought, what would happen to you if you dared to publish that now!

It was here that I became oblivious. I don't like reading the inscriptions on tombstones; it's eternally the same. Next to me on the slab lay a half-eaten sandwich: stupid and out of place. I threw it on the ground, since it wasn't bread but merely a sandwich. Anyhow, dropping bread on the ground, it seems, is not sinful; on the floor is sinful. Look it up in Suvorin's calendar.⁶

It must be supposed that I sat there for a long time, even much too long; that is, I even lay down on the oblong stone shaped like a marble coffin. And how did it happen that I suddenly started hearing various things? I didn't pay any attention at first and treated it with contempt. But, nevertheless, the conversation continued. I listened—the sounds were muffled, as if the mouths were covered with pillows; but distinct for all that, and very close. I came to, sat up, and started listening attentively.

"Your Excellency, this is simply quite impossible, sir. You named hearts, I'm whisting, and suddenly you've got the seven of diamonds. We ought to have arranged beforehand about the diamonds, sir."

"What, you mean play by memory? Where's the attraction in that?"

"It's impossible, Your Excellency, without a guarantee it's quite impossible. It absolutely has to be with a dummy, and so that there's only blind dealing."

"Well, you'll get no dummy here."

What presumptuous words, though! Both strange and unexpected. One voice is so weighty and solid, the other as if softly sweetened; I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't heard it myself. It seems I was not at the wake. And yet what was this card game doing here, and who was this general? That it was coming from under the gravestone, there was no doubt. I bent down and read the inscription on the memorial.

"Here lies the body of Major General Pervoedov... knight of such-and-such orders." Hm. "Died in August of the year... aged fifty-seven... Rest, dear dust, till the gladsome morning!"⁷

Hm, the devil, an actual general! The other grave, from which the fawning voice was coming, had no memorial as yet, just a slab; must have been a newcomer. A court councillor, by his voice.

"Oh, woe, woe, woe!" quite a new voice came, some thirty-five feet from the general's place, this time from under a perfectly fresh little grave—a male and low-class voice, but gone lax in a reverentially tender manner.

"Oh, woe, woe, woe!"

"Ah, he's hiccuping again!" suddenly came the squeamish and haughty voice of an irritated lady, seemingly of high society. "What a punishment to be next to this shopkeeper!"

"I didn't hiccup, I didn't even take any food, it's just my nature, that's all. And you, lady, with all these caprices of yours, you simply never can calm down."

"Why did you lie here, then?"

"I got laid here, I got laid by my spouse and little children, I didn't lay myself. The mystery of death! And I'd never lay next to you for anything, not even gold; but I'm laying by my own capital, according to the price, ma'am. For we're always able to pay up for our little third-class grave."

"Saved up? Cheated people?"

"Much I could cheat you, when there's been no payment from you, I reckon, since January. You've run up quite a little account in our shop."

"Well, this is stupid; I think looking for debts here is very stupid! Take yourself up there. Ask my niece; she's my heir."

"Where am I going to ask now, and where am I going to go? We've both reached the limit, and before God's judgment we're equal in our trespasses."

"In our trespasses!" the dead lady contemptuously mimicked. "Don't you dare even speak to me at all!"

"Oh, woe, woe, woe!"

"Nevertheless, the shopkeeper obeys the lady, Your Excellency."

"Why shouldn't he?"

"Well, you know, Your Excellency, considering there's a new order here."

"What sort of new order?"

"But we've died, so to speak, Your Excellency."

"Ah, yes! Well, there's still order..."

Well, thank you very much! Some comfort, really! If it's come to that here, what can we expect on the upper floor? But, anyhow, what antics! I went on listening, however, though with boundless indignation.

"No, I could live a little! No... you know, I... could live a little!" suddenly came someone's new voice, from somewhere in between the general and the irritable lady.

"Listen, Your Excellency, our man's at it again. For three days he's silent as can be, then suddenly: 'I could live a little, no, I could live a little!' And with, you know, such appetite, hee, hee!"

"And such light-mindedness."

"It's getting to him, Your Excellency, and, you know, he falls asleep, he's fast asleep already, he's been here since April, and suddenly: 'I could live a little!'"

"A bit boring, though," His Excellency observed.

"A bit boring, Your Excellency, maybe we'll tease Avdotya Ignatievna again, hee, hee?"

"Ah, no, I beg you, spare me that. I can't stand that insolent loudmouth."

"And I, on the other hand, can stand neither of you," the loudmouth squeamishly retorted. "You're both utterly boring and cannot talk about anything ideal. And as for you, Your Excellency—you needn't swagger so—I know a little story of how a lackey swept you from under some marital bed one morning with a broom."

"Nasty woman!" the general growled through his teeth.

"Avdotya Ignatievna, dearie," the shopkeeper suddenly cried out again, "my dear lady, meaning no harm, tell me what it is, am I visiting the torments,⁸ or is something else happening?..."

"Ah, he's at it again, I just knew it, because I get this smell from him, this smell, it's from him tossing around there."

"I don't toss around, dearie, and there's no special smell from me, because I preserved myself in the wholeness of my body, and it's you, dear lady, who's a bit gone off—because the smell really is unbearable, even considering the place. I don't say anything only out of politeness."

"Ah, nasty offender! Such a stink coming from him, and he shifts it onto me."

"Oh, woe, woe, woe! If only the fortieth day⁹ would come sooner: to hear the tearful voices above me, the wailing of my spouse and the quiet weeping of my children!..."

"Well, look what he's weeping about: they'll stuff their faces with *kutya*¹⁰ and leave. Ah, if only someone would wake up!"

"Avdotya Ignatievna," the fawning official spoke. "Wait a bit, the new ones will speak."

"And are any of them young?"

"There are young ones, Avdotya Ignatievna. Adolescents, even."

"Ah, that would be most welcome!"

"And what, they haven't started yet?" His Excellency inquired.

"Even the ones from two days ago haven't come to yet, Your Excellency, you know yourself they're sometimes silent for a whole week. It's a good thing so many suddenly got brought all at once yesterday, and the day before, and today. Otherwise, for a hundred feet around, they're all from last year."

"Yes, interesting."

"Look, Your Excellency, today they buried the actual privy councillor Tarasevich, I could tell from the voices. His nephew is an acquaintance of mine, he was lowering the coffin just now."

"Hm, is he here somewhere?"

"About five steps away from you, Your Excellency, to the left. Almost at your feet, sir... You ought to get acquainted, Your Excellency."

"Hm, no... I can't be the first."

"But he'll start it himself, Your Excellency. He'll even be flattered, leave it to me, Your Excellency, and I..."

"Ah, ah... ah, what's happened to me?" someone's frightened, new little voice suddenly groaned.

"A new one, Your Excellency, a new one, thank God, and so soon! Other times they're silent for a whole week."

"Ah, I think it's a young man!" squealed Avdotya Ignatievna.

"I... I... from complications, and so suddenly!" the young man prattled again. "Just the day before, Schulz says to me: you have complications, he says, and in the morning all at once I up and died. Ah! Ah!"

"Well, no help for it, young man," the general observed benignly, obviously glad of the newcomer, "you must take comfort! Welcome to our, so to speak, valley of Jehoshaphat.¹¹ We're kindly folk, you'll come to know and appreciate us. Major General Vassily Vassiliev Pervoedov, at your service."

"Ah, no! No, no, not to me! I went to Schulz; I had complications, you know, it got my chest first and I coughed, and then I caught cold: chest and grippe... and then suddenly, quite unexpectedly... above all, quite unexpectedly."

"You say it was the chest first," the official softly intervened, as if wishing to encourage the newcomer.

"Yes, the chest and phlegm, and suddenly no phlegm, and the chest, and I couldn't breathe... and you know..."

"I know, I know. But if it was your chest, you should have gone to Ecke, not to Schulz."

"And, you know, I kept thinking of Botkin¹²... and suddenly..."

"Well, Botkin's a bit stiff," the general observed.

"Ah, no, he's not stiff at all; I hear he's so attentive and tells you everything beforehand."

"His Excellency was referring to the cost," the official corrected.

"Ah, come now, just three roubles, and he examines so well, and his prescriptions... and I absolutely wanted to,

because I was told... What about it, gentlemen, shall I go to Ecker or to Botkin?"

"What? Where?" the general's corpse heaved, guffawing pleasantly. The official seconded him in falsetto.

"Dear boy, dear, delightful boy, how I love you!" Avdotya Ignatievna squealed rapturously. "I wish they'd laid one like him next to me!"

No, this I simply cannot allow! And this is a contemporary dead person! However, I must listen further and not jump to conclusions. This milksop newcomer—I remember him in his coffin just now—the expression of a frightened chick, the most disgusting in the world! What next, though.

But next such a hullabaloo broke out that my memory has not retained it all, for a great many woke up at once: an official woke up, one of our state councillors, and started in with the general right there and then about a projected subcommission in the ministry of——affairs and about a probable reshuffling of official posts attendant upon the subcommission, which the general found quite, quite amusing. I confess, I myself learned many new things, so that I marveled at the ways in which administrative news can sometimes be learned in this capital. Then some engineer half awoke, but for a long time he went on muttering complete nonsense, so that our people didn't even bother with him, but left him to lie it out for a while. Finally, the noble lady buried in the morning under a catafalque displayed signs of sepulchral inspiration. Lebezyatnikov (for the fawning court councillor I hated, the one placed next to General Pervoev, turned out to be named Lebezyatnikov) fussed a lot, surprised at them all waking up so quickly this time. I confess that I, too, was surprised; however, some of the ones that woke up had been buried two days before, for instance, one very young girl, about sixteen years old, who kept giggling—vilely and carnivorously giggling.

"Your Excellency, the privy councillor Tarasevich is waking up!" Lebezyatnikov announced suddenly in great haste.

"Ah, what's this?" the suddenly awakened privy councillor maundered squeamishly and in a lisping voice. The sound of his voice had something capriciously peremptory about it. I listened with curiosity, for in recent days I had heard something about this Tarasevich—tempting and alarming in the highest degree.

"It's me, Your Excellency, so far it's just me, sir."

"What is your request and what is it you want?"

"Only to inquire after Your Excellency's health; being unaccustomed, everybody feels sort of cramped here at first, sir... General Pervoev wishes to have the honor of making Your Excellency's acquaintance and hopes..."

"Never heard of him."

"Good gracious, Your Excellency, General Pervoev, Vassily Vassilievich..."

"You are General Pervoev?"

"No, Your Excellency, I'm merely Court Councillor Lebezyatnikov, at your service, sir, but General Pervoev..."

"Nonsense! And I beg you to leave me in peace."

"Leave off," General Pervoev himself finally put a dignified stop to the vile haste of his sepulchral client.

"He's not awake yet, Your Excellency, you must keep that in view, sir; it's from not being accustomed: he'll wake up and then take it differently, sir..."

"Leave off," the general repeated.

"Vassily Vassilievich! Hey there, Your Excellency!" an entirely new voice suddenly shouted loudly and eagerly right next to Avdotya Ignatievna—a gentlemanly and brash voice with a fashionably weary articulation and an impudent scansion. "I've been observing the lot of you for two hours already; I've been lying here for three days; remember me, Vassily Vassilievich? Klinevich—we used to meet at the Volokonskys', where I don't know why but you, too, were admitted."

"Well, Count Pyotr Petrovich... but can it be that you, too... and so young... I *am* sorry!"

"I'm sorry myself, only it's all the same to me, and I want to get the most I can from everywhere. And it's not count, it's baron, just plain baron. We're some mangy little barons, from lackey ancestry, and I don't even know why—spit on it. I'm just a blackguard from pseudo-high-society and considered a 'sweet *polisson*.'¹³ My father was some sort of little general, and my mother was once received *en haut* lie.¹⁴ Ziefel the Yid and I passed fifty thousand in false banknotes last year, but I denounced him, and Yulka Charpentier de Lusignan¹⁵ took all the money with her to Bordeaux. And, imagine, I was already quite engaged—the Shchevalevsky girl, three months shy of sixteen, still in boarding school, comes with ninety thousand in dowry. Avdotya Ignatievna, remember how you corrupted me fifteen years ago, when I was just a fourteen-year-old page?..."

"Ah, it's you, you blackguard! Well, at least God sent you, otherwise here it's..."

"You shouldn't have suspected your negotiant neighbor of smelling bad... I just kept quiet and laughed. It's from me; they even buried me in a nailed coffin."

"Ah, nasty man! Only I'm glad even so; you wouldn't believe, Klinevich, you wouldn't believe what a dearth of life and wit there is here."

"Yes, yes, but I intend to start something original here. Your Excellency—not you, Pervoev—Your Excellency, the other one, Mr. Tarasevich, the privy councillor! Answer me! It's Klinevich, the one who took you to Mademoiselle Furie last lent, do you hear me?"

"I hear you, Klinevich, and I'm very glad, and believe me..."

"I don't believe a groat's worth, and spit on it. I'd simply like to kiss you, dear old boy, but I can't, thank God. Do you know, gentlemen, what this *grand-père* pulled off? He died two or three days ago and, can you imagine, left a whole four hundred thousand missing from the treasury? The fund was intended for widows and orphans, and for some reason he alone was in charge of it, so that in the end he wasn't audited for about eight years. I can picture what long faces they've all got there now and how they'll remember him! A delectable thought, isn't it? All last year I kept being surprised at how such a seventy-year-old codger, podagric and chiragric, could have preserved so much strength for depravity, and—now here's the answer! Those widows and orphans—oh, the mere thought of them must have inflamed him!... I knew about it for a long time, I was the only one, Charpentier told me, and the moment I found out, right then, during Holy

Week, I pressed him in a friendly way: 'Hand me over twenty-five thousand or else you'll be audited tomorrow.' And, imagine, he came up with only thirteen thousand then, so it seems very opportune that he died now. *Grand-père, grand-père*, do you hear me?"

"*Cher Klinevich*, I quite agree with you, and you needn't... go into such detail. There's so much suffering and torment in life, and so little reward... I wished finally to have some peace, and, as far as I can see, I hope even here to extract all..."

"I'll bet he's already sniffed out about Katie Berestov!"

"What?... What Katie?" the old man's voice trembled carnivorously.

"Aha, what Katie? Here, to the left, five steps from me, ten from you. It's the fifth day she's been here, and if you knew, *grand-père*, what a little hellcat she is... from a good family, educated, and—a monster, a monster to the last degree! I never showed her to anybody there, I alone knew... Katie, answer me!"

"Hee, hee, hee!" answered the cracked sound of a girl's voice, but one could hear something like the prick of a needle in it. "Hee, hee, hee!"

"Is... she... blond?" the *grand-père* babbled, faltering, in three gasps.

"Hee, hee, hee!"

"I... I've long dreamed," the old man babbled breathlessly, "a lovely dream about a little blonde... fifteen or so... and precisely in such a situation..."

"Ah, abominable!" Avdotya Ignatievna exclaimed.

"Enough!" Klinevich decided. "I see the material is excellent. We'll immediately set things up here in the best possible way. Above all so as to spend the rest of our time merrily; but what sort of time? Hey, you, the official or whatever, Lebezyatnikov, I've heard they call you that!"

"Lebezyatnikov, court councillor, Semyon Evseych, at your service, and very, very, very gladly."

"Spit on your gladly, only you seem to know everything here. Tell me, first of all (I've been wondering since yesterday), how is it that we can speak here? We're dead and yet we can speak; we also move, as it were, and yet we don't speak or move? What's the trick?"

"If you wish, Baron, this can better be explained to you by Platon Nikolaevich."

"What Platon Nikolaevich? Don't mumble, get to the point."

"Platon Nikolaevich, our local homegrown philosopher, natural scientist, and magister. He put out several books on philosophy, but it's three months now and he's falling quite asleep, so it's no longer possible to shake him out of it. Once a week he mutters a few words that are quite beside the point."

"To the point, to the point!..."

"He explains it all with the most simple fact—namely, that up there, while we were still alive, we mistakenly regarded death there as death. Here the body revives again, as it were, the remnants of life concentrate, but only in the consciousness. It's—I don't know how to put it—life continuing as if by inertia. Everything is concentrated, in his opinion, somewhere in the consciousness, and goes on for another two or three months... sometimes even half a year... There's one here, for instance, who is almost entirely decomposed, but once in six weeks, say, he suddenly mutters some little word, a meaningless one, of course, about some bobok: 'Bobok, bobok'—which means that in him, too, an imperceptible spark of life is still glimmering..."

"Rather stupid. Well, and how is it that I have no sense of smell, but can feel the stench?"

"That's... heh, heh... Well, here our philosopher got himself into a fog. He observed precisely about smelling that here the stench one can feel is, so to speak, a moral one—heh, heh! A stench as if of the soul, so that one has time in these two or three months to reconsider... and that it is, so to speak, the last mercy... Only it seems to me, Baron, that this is all mystical raving, quite excusable in his position..."

"Enough, and the rest, I'm sure, is all nonsense. The main thing is two or three months of life, and in the final end—bobok. I suggest that we all spend these two months as pleasurably as possible, and for that we should all set things up on a different basis. Gentlemen! I propose that we not be ashamed of anything!"

"Ah, let's not be, let's not be ashamed of anything!" many voices were heard, and strangely, even quite new voices, meaning that in the interim new ones had awakened. With especial readiness, the now completely recovered engineer thundered his consent in a bass voice. The girl Katie giggled joyfully.

"Ah, how I want not to be ashamed of anything!" Avdotya Ignatievna exclaimed with rapture.

"Do you hear, if even Avdotya Ignatievna wants not to be ashamed of anything..."

"No, no, no, Klinevich, I was ashamed, I was ashamed there even so, but here I want terribly, terribly not to be ashamed of anything!"

"I gather, Klinevich," the engineer barked, "that you suggest setting up the—so to speak—life here on new and now reasonable principles."

"Well, that I spit on! Regarding that, let's wait for Kudayarov, who was brought yesterday. He'll wake up and explain everything to you. He's such a person, such a gigantic person! Tomorrow I expect they'll drag yet another natural scientist here, another officer probably, and, in three or four days, if I'm not mistaken, some feuilletonist and, I think, his editor along with him. Anyway, to hell with them, it's just that we'll have our little crew assembled here and it will all get set up by itself. But meanwhile I want there to be no lying. That's the only thing I want, because it's the main thing. It's impossible to live on earth and not lie, for life and lie are synonymous; but here, just for the fun of it, we won't lie. Devil take it, the grave does mean something after all! We'll all tell our stories aloud and not be ashamed of anything now. I'll tell about myself first of all. I'm one of the carnivorous ones, you know. Up there it was all tied with rotten ropes. Away with the ropes, and let's live for these two months in the most shameless truth! Let's strip and get naked!"

"Get naked, get naked!" voices shouted all around.

"I want terribly, terribly to get naked!" Avdotya Ignatievna squealed.

"Ah... ah... ah, I see it's going to be fun here; I don't want to go to Ecke!"

"No, I could live a little, no, you know, I could live a little!"

"Hee, hee, hee!" Katie giggled.

"The main thing is that no one can forbid us, and though I can see that Pervoedov is angry, he still can't reach me with his hand. *Grand-père*, do you agree?"

"I fully, fully agree, and with the greatest pleasure, provided Katie is the first to start her bi-og-raphy."

"I protest! I protest with all my strength," General Pervoedov stated firmly.

"Your Excellency!" the blackguard Lebezyatnikov, in hasty agitation and with lowered voice, babbled and persuaded, "Your Excellency, it's even more profitable for us if we agree. There's this girl here, you know... and, finally, all these different antics..."

"Granted there's the girl, but..."

"It's more profitable, Your Excellency, by God it's more profitable for you! Well, at least as a little sample, at least for a try..."

"Even in the grave they won't let me rest!"

"First of all, General, you play cards in the grave, and, second of all, we spit on you," Klinevich scanned out.

"My dear sir, I beg you all the same not to forget yourself."

"What? You can't reach me, and I can tease you from here like Yulka's lapdog. And first of all, gentlemen, what sort of general is he here? It's there that he was a general, but here—pfft!"

"No, not pfft... here, too, I'm..."

"Here you'll rot in your coffin and there'll be only six brass buttons left!"

"Bravo, Klinevich, ha, ha, ha!" voices bellowed.

"I served my sovereign... I wear a sword..."

"Your sword's good for skewering mice, and besides you never drew it."

"It's all the same, sir; I constituted part of the whole."

"We know these parts of the whole."

"Bravo, Klinevich, bravo, ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't understand what a sword is," the engineer declared.

"We'll run like mice from the Prussians,¹⁶ they'll make mincemeat of us!" a voice farther away and unknown to me cried out, literally spluttering with rapture.

"A sword, sir, is honor," came the general's cry, but that was the last I heard of him. A long and furious bellowing, uproar, and racket arose, and only Avdotya Ignatievna's squeals, impatient to the point of hysterics, could be made out.

"Quicker, be quicker! Ah, when are we going to start not being ashamed of anything!"

"Oh, woe, woe! Truly my soul is visiting the torments!" came the voice of the simple man, and ...

And here I suddenly sneezed. It happened unexpectedly and unintentionally, but the effect was striking: all became still, just like a cemetery, vanished like a dream. A true graveyard silence fell. I don't think they were ashamed before me: they had decided not to be ashamed of anything! I waited for about five minutes but—not a word, not a sound. It was also impossible to suppose that they feared a denunciation to the police; for what could the police do here? I'm forced to conclude that they must after all have some secret unknown to mortals, and which they carefully conceal from every mortal.

"Well, my dears," I thought, "I'll be visiting you again," and with those words I left the cemetery.

No, this I cannot allow; no, I truly cannot! It's not bobok that bothers me (so here's that bobok!).

Depravity in such a place, the depravity of last hopes, the depravity of flabby and rotting corpses and—not even sparing the last moments of consciousness! They're given, they're made a gift of these moments and... And, above all, above all in such a place! No, this I cannot allow...

I'll visit other classes, I'll listen everywhere. The point is that I must listen everywhere, and not just at one end, to form an idea. Perhaps I'll bump into something com forting.

And I'll certainly go back to those ones. They promised their biographies and various little anecdotes. Pah! But I'll go, I'll certainly go; it's a matter of conscience!

I'll take it to *The Citizen*,¹⁷ they also exhibited the portrait of some editor. Maybe they'll print it.

THE MEEK ONE

A FANTASTIC STORY

From the Author

I BEG MY readers' pardon for giving them this time, instead of the *Diary* in its usual form, simply a long story. But I have in fact been occupied with this story for the better part of the month. In any case, I beg the readers' indulgence. Now about the story itself. I have termed it "fantastic," though I myself consider it realistic in the highest degree. But there is indeed a fantastic side to it, and namely in the very form of the story, which I find it necessary to clarify beforehand.

The thing is that this is not a story and not notes. Imagine to yourself a husband whose wife is lying on the table,¹ a suicide, who a few hours earlier threw herself out the window. He is in bewilderment and has not yet had time to collect his thoughts. He paces his rooms and tries to make sense of what has happened, "to collect his thoughts to a point." Besides, he is an inveterate hypochondriac, of the sort that talks to himself. Here he is, then, talking to himself, telling the matter over, *figuring it out* for himself. Despite the seeming consistency of his speech, he contradicts himself several times, both in logic and in feelings. He justifies himself, and accuses her, and launches into extraneous explanations: there is coarseness of thought and heart here; there is also deep feeling. Little by little he actually *figures out* the matter and collects his "thoughts to a point." A series of memories he calls up brings him irresistibly to the *truth*; the truth irresistibly elevates his mind and heart. Toward the end even the tone of the story changes, as compared with its disorderly beginning. The truth is disclosed to the unfortunate man quite clearly and definitely, at least for himself.

That is the theme. Of course, the process of telling goes on for several hours, in bits and snatches, and in incoherent form: now he talks to himself, now it is as if he addresses an invisible listener, some judge. But so it always happens in reality. If a stenographer could eavesdrop and write it all down after him, it would come out a bit rougher, less polished than I have presented it, but, for all I can see, the psychological order would perhaps remain the same. Now, this supposition of a stenographer who could write it all down (after which I would polish what was written) is what I call fantastic in this story. But a somewhat similar thing has been allowed in art more than once: Victor Hugo, for instance, in his masterpiece *The Last Day of a Man Condemned to Death*, employed almost the same method, and though he introduced no stenographer, he allowed for still greater implausibility, supposing that a man condemned to death is able (and has time) to write notes not only on his last day, but even in his last hour and literally his last minute. But had he not allowed this fantasy, the work itself would not exist—the most realistic and truthful of all he wrote.

CHAPTER ONE

I

WHO I WAS AND WHO SHE WAS

...**S**O LONG as she's here—everything is still all right: I go over and look every moment; but tomorrow she'll be taken away and—how am I to stay alone? She's in the big room now, on a table, we put two card tables together, and the coffin will come tomorrow, a white one, white gros de Naples, but, anyhow, it's not that... I keep pacing and want to figure it out for myself. It's already six hours now that I've been wanting to figure it out and I simply can't collect my thoughts to a point. The thing is that I keep pacing, pacing, pacing... Here is how it was. I'll simply tell it in order (order!). Gentlemen, I'm far from being a writer, and you can see that, and let it be so, but I'll tell it as I understand it. There's my whole horror—that I understand everything!

This, if you want to know, that is, if we take it from the very beginning, quite simply that she used to come to me then to pawn things in order to pay for an advertisement in *The Voice*,² saying here, thus and so, a governess, agrees to relocate, and give lessons at home, and so on and so forth. This was at the very beginning, and I, of course, didn't distinguish her from the others: she comes like everybody else, well, and so forth. But later I began to distinguish. She was so slender, fair-haired, medium tall; with me she was always awkward, as if abashed (I think she was the same with all strangers, and, naturally, I was the same for her as any other, that is, taken not as a pawnbroker but as a human being). As soon as she got the money, she would turn and leave at once. And all silently. Others, they argue, beg, bargain in order to get more; this one no, just what's given... It seems to me I keep getting confused... Yes; first of all I was struck by her things: gilt silver earrings, a trashy little locket—things worth two bits. She knew herself they were only a bit's worth, yet I saw by her face that they were treasures for her—and in fact it was all she had left from her papa and mama, I found out later. Once only did I allow myself to smile at her things. That is, you see, I never allow myself that, I keep a gentlemanly tone with the public: a few words, polite and stern. "Stern, stern, stern." But she suddenly allowed herself to bring the remnants (I mean, literally) of an old rabbitskin jacket—and I couldn't help myself and suddenly said something to her, as if a witticism. Goodness, how she flushed! Her eyes are light blue, big, pensive, but—how they lit up! But she didn't let out a word, she took her "remnants" and—left. It was then that I took *particular* notice of her for the first time and thought something of that sort about her, that is, precisely of that particular sort. Yes: I also remember the impression, that is, if you like, the main impression, the synthesis of everything: namely, that she was terribly young, so young, as if she were just fourteen years old. And yet she was three months short of sixteen then. But anyway that's not what I wanted to say, the synthesis wasn't in that at all. Next day she came again. I found out later that she had gone with the jacket to Dobronravov and to Moser, but they take nothing but gold and wouldn't even speak to her. But I once took a cameo from her (a trashy one)—and, on reflection, was surprised afterward: I, too, take nothing but gold and silver, yet I accepted a cameo from her. That was my second thought about her then, I remember it.

This time, that is, after Moser, she brought an amber cigar holder—a so-so little thing, for an amateur, but once again worth nothing with us, because we take only gold. Since she came after the previous day's *rebellion*, I met her sternly. Sternness with me is dryness. However, as I handed her the two roubles, I couldn't help myself and said as if with a certain irritation: "I'm doing it only *for you*, Moser wouldn't take such a thing from you." I especially emphasized the words *for you*, and precisely in a *certain sense*. I was angry. She flushed again on hearing this *for you*, but held her peace, didn't drop the money, took it—that's poverty! But how she flushed! I realized that I'd stung her. And after she left, I suddenly asked myself: can it really be that this triumph over her cost two roubles? Heh, heh, heh! I remember twice asking precisely this question: "Is it worth it? Is it worth it?" And, laughing, I resolved it for myself in the affirmative. I got quite merry then. But this wasn't a bad feeling: I had a design, an intention: I wanted to test her, because I suddenly had some thoughts fermenting in me concerning her. This was my third *particular* thought about her.

... Well, so from then on it all got started. Naturally, I at once made indirect efforts to find out all the circumstances and waited with particular impatience for her to come. I did have a feeling that she would come soon. When she came, I entered into friendly conversation with unusual politeness. I'm not badly brought up and have manners. Hm. It was then I guessed that she was kind and meek. The kind and meek ones don't resist for long, and though they don't really open up completely, still they can't quite avoid conversing: they reply charily, but they do reply, and the more the further, only don't get tired yourself if it's something you need. Naturally, she didn't explain anything to me herself that time. It was later that I found out about *The Voice* and everything. She was then spending her last strength to advertise, at first, naturally, with pride, something like: "Governess, willing to relocate, send letter stating conditions," but then: "Willing to do anything, teach, be a companion, keep house, tend the sick, can sew," etc., etc., the same old stuff! Naturally, all this was added to the advertisement gradually, and toward the end, when things got desperate, there was even "without salary, in exchange for board." No, she didn't find a situation! I ventured then to test her for a last time: I suddenly take today's *Voice* and show her an advertisement: "Young person, orphan, seeks position as governess of small children, preferably with an older widower. Can help with housework."

"There, you see, this woman placed an advertisement this morning, and by evening she'll certainly have found work. That's how one should advertise!"

Again she flushed, again her eyes lit up, she turned and left at once. I liked that very much. However, I was already sure of everything by then and had no fear: no one was going to take cigar holders from her. And she had already run out of cigar holders. So it was, on the third day she came, so pale, alarmed—I understood that something had happened with her at home, and in fact it had. I'll explain presently what had happened, but now I just want to recall how I suddenly displayed my chic before her then and grew taller in her eyes. The intention suddenly appeared in me. The thing was that

she brought this icon (got herself to bring it)... Ah, listen! listen! Here's where it begins, and before I kept getting confused... The thing is that I want to recall it all now, each trifle, each little feature. I keep wanting to collect my thoughts to a point and—I can't, and now these little features, these little features ...

An icon of the Mother of God. The Mother of God with the Child, from home, from her family, an old one, in a gilt silver casing—worth—well, worth about six roubles. I can see the icon is dear to her, she wants to pawn the whole icon, without removing the casing. I tell her it's better to remove the casing and keep the icon; because it's still an icon after all.

"Is it forbidden for you?"

"No, not really forbidden, but just so, maybe, you yourself..."

"Well, remove it, then."

"You know what, I won't remove it, I'll put it on the stand over there," I said on reflection, "with the other icons, under the lamp" (ever since I opened my shop, I've always kept an icon lamp burning), "and you can quite simply take ten roubles."

"I don't want ten, give me five, I'll certainly buy it back."

"You don't want ten? The icon's worth it," I added, noticing that her eyes flashed again. She held her peace. I brought her five roubles.

"Don't despise anyone, I've felt the same pinch myself, and even worse, and if you now see me in this occupation, miss... after all I've endured it's..."

"You're taking revenge on society, is that it?" she interrupted me suddenly with rather caustic mockery, in which, however, there was a good deal of innocence (that is, of generality, because she decidedly did not distinguish me from others then, so that she said it almost inoffensively). "Aha!" thought I, "that's how you are, the character's coming out, of the new tendency."

"You see," I observed at once, half jokingly, half mysteriously, "I—I'm part of that part of the whole that wishes to do evil, but does good..."

She glanced at me quickly and with great curiosity, in which, however, there was a good deal of childishness:

"Wait... What is that thought? Where is it from? I've heard it somewhere..."

"Don't rack your brain, Mephistopheles recommends himself to Faust in those terms. Have you read *Faust*?"³

"Not... not attentively."

"That is, you haven't read it at all. You ought to read it. However, I see a mocking twist on your lips again. Please don't suppose me to be of so little taste as to wish to paint over my role as a pawnbroker by recommending myself as a Mephistopheles. Once a pawnbroker, always a pawnbroker. We know that, miss."

"You're somehow strange... I didn't want to say anything like that at all..."

She wanted to say: I didn't expect you to be an educated man, but she didn't say it, though I knew she was thinking it; I pleased her terribly.

"You see," I observed, "one can do good in any occupation. I don't mean myself, of course, I, let's say, do nothing but bad, but..."

"Of course one can do good in any situation," she said, glancing at me with a quick and meaning look. "Precisely in any situation," she suddenly added. Oh, I remember, I remember all those moments! And I also want to add that these young people, these dear young people, when they want to say something intelligent and meaningful, suddenly show, with all too much sincerity and naivete on their faces, that "here I am saying something intelligent and meaningful to you"—and not out of vanity, like our sort, but you can see that she herself values all this terribly, and believes it, and respects it, and thinks that you, too, respect it the same way she does. Oh sincerity! This is how they win one over. And it was so lovely in her!

I remember, I haven't forgotten anything! When she left, I made up my mind all at once. That same day I went to make my final search and found out all the rest of her then current innermost secrets; all the former innermost secrets I already knew from Lukerya, who was then their servant and whom I had bribed several days earlier. These innermost secrets were so horrible that I don't even understand how she could have laughed as she did that day and been curious about Mephistopheles' saying, being under such horror herself. But—youth! I thought precisely that about her then, with pride and with joy, because there was magnanimity in it: on the verge of ruin, yet Goethe's great words still shine. Youth is always magnanimous, be it ever so slightly, even lopsidedly. That is, I mean her, her alone. And, above all, I already looked at her then as *mine* and had no doubt of my power. You know, it is a most voluptuous thought, when one no longer has any doubts.

But what's the matter with me. If I do it this way, when will I collect it all into a point? Quickly, quickly... this is not it at all, oh, God!

II A MARRIAGE PROPOSAL

The "innermost secrets" I found out about her can be explained in a word: her father and mother had died, already long ago, three years before, and she was left with some disorderly aunts. That is, it's not enough to call them disorderly. One was a widow with a big family, six children, each smaller than the next; the other was a spinster, old and nasty. They were both nasty. Her father had been in the civil service, but as a scrivener, and of merely nonhereditary nobility—in short, it all played into my hands. I came as if from a higher world: a retired staff captain, after all, of a brilliant regiment, a hereditary nobleman, independent, and so on, and as for the pawnshop, the aunts could only look upon it with respect. She had slaved for the aunts for three years, but passed an examination somewhere all the same—struggled to pass it, managed to pass it, from under her merciless daily work—and that did mean something about her yearning toward the lofty and noble! After all, why did I want to get married? Spit on me, though, that's for later... As if that was

the point! She taught her aunt's children, did sewing, and toward the end not just sewing but, with her bad chest, also scrubbed the floors. Quite simply, they even beat her, reproached her for every crumb. In the end they were intending to sell her. Pah! I omit the filth of the details. Later she told me everything in detail. For a whole year a fat neighboring shopkeeper had been observing it all, not a simple shopkeeper, but with two grocery stores. He had already given a sweet time to two wives and was looking for a third, and so he cast an eye on her: "Quiet," he thought, "grew up in poverty, and I'm marrying for my orphans." In fact, he did have orphans. He sent a matchmaker, began making arrangements with the aunts, what's more—he was fifty years old; she was horrified. It was then that she began coming to me often, so as to place advertisements in *The Voice*. Finally, she started asking her aunts to give her a bit of time to think it over. They gave her this bit, but just one, no more, because, they carped: "We don't know what we'll grub up ourselves, even without an extra mouth." I already knew it all, and after that morning I made my decision. In the evening the merchant came, bringing a pound of candy from his shop worth fifty kopecks; she was sitting with him, and I called Lukerya out from the kitchen and told her to go and whisper to her that I was at the gate and wished to tell her something most urgently. I remained pleased with myself. And generally all that day I had been awfully pleased.

There at the gate, in Lukerya's presence, I explained to her, amazed as she already was by the fact of my calling her outside, that I would consider it a happiness and an honor... Second: not to be surprised at my manner and that it was at the gate: "I'm a direct man," I said, "and I've looked into the circumstances of the matter." And I wasn't lying that I'm direct. Well, spit on it. I spoke not only decently, that is, showing a man of breeding, but also originally, and that's the main thing. So what, is it a sin to confess it? I want to judge myself and so I do. I must speak pro and contra, and so I do. Later I also remembered it with delight, though that is stupid: I declared directly, without any embarrassment, first, that I was not especially talented, not especially intelligent, maybe not even especially kind, a rather cheap egoist (I remember that expression, I thought it up then, on my way there, and remained pleased), and that it was very, very possible that I contained in myself much that was also unpleasant in many other respects. All this was spoken with a special sort of pride—we all know how such things are said. Of course, I had taste enough, after nobly declaring my shortcomings, not to start declaring my merits, saying: "But, on the other hand, I have this, this, and that." I could see that so far she was terribly afraid, but I didn't soften anything, what's more, seeing that she was afraid, I intensified it on purpose: I said directly that she would have enough to eat, but as for outfits, theaters, balls—there would be none of that, or not till later, when I'd reached my goal. This stern tone decidedly carried me away. I added, also as casually as possible, that if I'd taken such an occupation, that is, keeping this shop, it was that I had a certain goal, there was a certain circumstance... But I had the right to speak that way: I actually had such a goal and such a circumstance. Wait, gentlemen, all my life I've been the first to hate this pawnshop, but, as a matter of fact, though it's ridiculous to speak in mysterious phrases to oneself, I was in fact "taking revenge on society," really, really, really! So that her morning witticism about my "taking revenge" was unjust. That is, you see, if I had told her directly in so many words: "Yes, I'm taking revenge on society," and she had burst out laughing, as she did that morning, it would in fact have come out ridiculous. Well, but by an indirect hint, by letting in a mysterious phrase, it turned out that one could bribe the imagination. Besides, I no longer feared anything then: I knew that the fat shopkeeper was in any case more disgusting to her and that I, standing there at the gate, was a deliverer. That I understood. Oh, man understands meanness especially well! But was it meanness? How can one judge a man here? Didn't I already love her even then?

Wait: naturally, I didn't say half a word to her then about being a benefactor; on the contrary, oh, on the contrary: "It's you," I might have said, "who are *my* benefactor, not I *yours*." So that I even put it into words, I couldn't help myself, and it came out stupid, perhaps, because I noticed a fleeting wrinkle on her face. But on the whole I was decidedly the winner. Wait, if I'm to recall all this filth, I'll also recall the ultimate swinishness: I was standing there, and it was stirring in my head: you're tall, well built, well bred, and—and, finally, speaking without braggadocio, you're not bad looking. That's what was playing through my mind. Naturally, she said yes to me right there at the gate. But... but I must add: right there at the gate she thought for a long time before she said yes. She got so thoughtful, so thoughtful, that I already started asking: "Well, what is it?"—and even couldn't help myself, asking with a certain chic: "Well, what is it, miss?"—adding a polite touch.

"Wait, I'm thinking."

And her little face was so serious, so serious—that even then I might have read! And there I was feeling offended: "Can it be," I thought, "that she's choosing between me and the merchant?" Oh, I didn't understand then! I didn't understand anything, not anything! Until today I didn't understand! I remember Lukerya ran out after me, as I was leaving, stopped me in the street, and said breathlessly: "God will reward you, sir, for taking our dear young lady, only don't tell it to her, she's proud."

Proud, eh! I say I like the proud ones myself. The proud ones are especially good when... well, when one no longer doubts one's power over them, eh? Oh, mean, clumsy man! Oh, how pleased I was! Do you know, she might, when she was standing at the gate then, thinking whether to say yes to me, and I got surprised, do you know, she might even have been thinking: "If it's disaster either way, isn't it better to choose the worst straight off, that is, the fat shopkeeper, let him get drunk and quickly beat me to death!" Eh? What do you think, could she have had such a thought?

And now, too, I don't understand, now, too, I don't understand anything! I only just said that she might have had this thought: to choose the worst of two disasters, that is, the merchant? But who was worse for her then—I or the merchant? The merchant or the pawnbroker quoting Goethe? That's still a question! Why a question? And you don't understand this: the answer's lying on the table, and you say question! No, but spit on me! I'm not the point... And by the way, what is it to me now—whether I'm the point or not? That's something I'm quite unable to decide. I'd better go to bed. I have a headache...

III

THE NOBLEST OF MEN, BUT I DON'T BELIEVE IT MYSELF

Didn't fall asleep. How could I, some pulse was throbbing in my head. I want to take it all in, all this filth. Oh, filth! Oh, what filth I dragged her out of then! She really ought to have understood it, to have appreciated my action! I also liked various thoughts, for instance, that I was forty-one and she had just turned sixteen. This captivated me, this feeling of inequality, very sweet it was, very sweet.

I, for instance, wanted to do the wedding *à l'anglaise*,⁴ that is, decidedly the two of us, with perhaps two witnesses, one of them Lukerya, and then straight to the train, say, for instance, to Moscow (I happened incidentally to have business there), to a hotel, for a couple of weeks. She protested, she wouldn't allow it, and I was forced to go visiting her aunts, honoring them as relatives from whom I was taking her. I yielded, and the aunts were rendered their due. I even gave the creatures a hundred roubles each and promised more, naturally without telling her anything about it, so as not to upset her by the meanness of the situation. The aunts at once became like silk. There was also an argument about the dowry: she had nothing, almost literally, but she also wanted nothing. I, however, succeeded in proving to her that nothing at all was not possible, and I took care of the dowry, because who else would do anything for her? Well, but spit on talking about me. My various ideas, however, I did manage to tell her then, so that she'd at least know. Even too hastily, perhaps. The main thing is that from the very first, though she tried to hold back, she threw herself to me with love, she would meet me with rapture when I came home in the evening, told me in her prattle (the charming prattle of innocence!) all about her childhood, her infancy, her parental home, her father and mother. But I immediately doused all this ecstasy at once with cold water. It was in this that my idea lay. To her raptures I responded with silence, benevolent, of course... but all the same she quickly saw that we were different, and that I was—a riddle. And I was, above all, aiming at a riddle! It was for the sake of posing a riddle, perhaps, that I did all this stupidity! First of all, sternness—so it was under sternness that I brought her into my house. In short, though I was very pleased, I set about creating a whole system then. Oh, it poured out by itself quite effortlessly. And it couldn't have been otherwise, I had to create this system, owing to an irresistible circumstance—what am I doing, in fact, slandering myself! The system was a true one. No, listen, if you're going to judge a man, you must know the case... Listen!

How shall I begin, because it's very difficult. Once you start justifying yourself—it gets difficult. You see: young people, for instance, despise money—I right away emphasized money; I stressed money. And I emphasized it so much that she began to grow more and more silent. She'd open her big eyes, listen, look, and keep silent. You see: young people are magnanimous, that is, the good ones are, magnanimous and impulsive, but they have little tolerance, the moment something's not right—there's scorn. And I wanted breadth, I wanted to implant breadth right in her heart, implant it in her own heart's view, isn't that so? I'll take a banal example: how, for instance, should I explain my pawnshop to such a character? Naturally, I didn't speak of it directly, otherwise it would have come out that I was asking forgiveness for the pawnshop, but I acted, so to speak, through pride, I spoke almost silently. And I'm a master of speaking silently, I've spent my whole life speaking silently and have silently lived through whole tragedies with myself. Oh, but I was also unhappy! I had been discarded by everyone, discarded and forgotten, and no one, no one knows it! And suddenly this sixteen-year-old girl snatched all sorts of details from mean people afterward and thought she knew everything, but the secret meanwhile remained only in this man's breast! I kept silent, and especially, especially kept silent with her, right up till yesterday—why did I keep silent? As a proud man. I wanted her to find out herself, without me, not from mean people's talk now, but that she should *guess herself* about this man and comprehend him! Receiving her into my house, I wanted full respect. I wanted her to stand before me entreatingly for the sake of my suffering—and I was worth it. Oh, I was always proud, I always wanted all or nothing! That's precisely why, because I'm no halfway man in happiness, but wanted all, that's precisely why I was forced to act as I did then, as if to say: "Guess yourself, and appreciate it!" Because, you must agree, if I myself had begun explaining and prompting, shuffling and begging for respect—it would have been as if I were begging alms... But anyhow... but anyhow, why am I talking about that?

Stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid! Directly and mercilessly (and I emphasize that it was mercilessly), I explained to her then, in a few words, that the magnanimity of youth is lovely, but—not worth a groat. Why not? Because it comes

cheap, it's acquired without living, it's all, so to speak, "the first impressions of being,"⁵ but let's see you do any work! Cheap magnanimity is always easy, and even to give your life—that, too, is cheap, because here it's just hot blood and surplus strength,⁶ one passionately desires beauty! No, take a deed of magnanimity that's difficult, quiet, inaudible, unglamorous, with calumny, where there's much sacrifice and not a drop of glory—where you, a shining man, are presented as a scoundrel before everyone, whereas you're more honest than anyone else on earth—go and try that deed, no, you'd give it up! And I—all I've done all my life is bear that deed. At first she argued, and how she argued, but then she began to grow silent, even completely, only widening her eyes terribly as she listened, such big, big eyes, so attentive. And... and besides that, I suddenly saw a smile, mistrustful, silent, not nice. It was with this smile that I brought her into my house. It's also true that she had nowhere else to go ...

IV PLANS AND MORE PLANS

Which of us was the first to begin it then?

Neither. It began by itself from the first step. I said I brought her into my house under sternness, yet from the first step I softened it. It was explained to her, while still a fiancée, that she would be occupied with taking the pledges and handing out the money, and she said nothing then (note that). What's more—she took to the business even with zeal. Well, of course, the apartment, the furniture—it all remained the same. The apartment has two rooms: one, a big room with a partition, beyond which is the shop; and the other, also a big one, our living room, as well as bedroom. My furniture is scanty; even her aunts had better. My icon stand with the icon lamp is in the other room, where the shop is; in my room there is my bookcase with a few books in it, and a trunk, to which I kept the keys; also a bed, tables, chairs. While she was still my fiancée I told her that one rouble a day, no more, was allotted for our keep, that is, food for me,

her, and Lukerya, whom I had lured to us: “I need thirty thousand in three years,” I said, “otherwise one can’t make money.” She didn’t object, but I raised it thirty kopecks myself. The same with the theater. I had told my fiancée there would be no theater, and yet I decided there should be theater once a month, and that decently, in the orchestra. We went together, three times it was, to see *Pursuit of Happiness* and *Songbirds*,⁷ I think. (Oh, spit on it, who cares!) We went silently, and came home silently. Why, why did we start being silent from the very beginning? In the beginning there were no quarrels, but there was silence. She kept looking at me then, I remember, somehow on the sly; when I noticed it, I intensified my silence. True, it was I who stressed silence, not she. Once or twice there were impulses on her part, she would rush to embrace me; but since these were morbid, hysterical impulses, and I needed firm happiness, along with respect from her, I took it coldly. And I was right: each time after such an impulse, there was a quarrel the next day.

That is, again, there were no quarrels, but there was silence and—and a more and more bold look on her part. “Rebellion and independence”—that’s what it was, only she didn’t know how. Yes, that meek face was becoming bolder and bolder. Would you believe, I was becoming repugnant to her, I studied it thoroughly. And there was no doubting the fact that she had fits of temper. So, for example, after getting out of such filth and beggarliness, after having scrubbed floors, she would suddenly start sniffing at our poverty! You see, sirs: it wasn’t poverty, it was economy, and, where necessary, even luxury—with linens, for instance, with cleanliness. I had always dreamed, before, that cleanliness in a husband is attractive to a wife. However, it wasn’t at poverty, it was at my supposed stinginess in economy: “He has goals, he shows a firm character.” She suddenly gave up the theater herself. And more and more of this mocking wrinkle... and I was intensifying my silence, intensifying my silence.

I couldn’t go justifying myself, could I? It was mainly this pawnshop. Excuse me, sirs: I knew that a woman, and a sixteen-year-old one at that, can’t help submitting wholly to a man. There’s no originality in women, that—that is an axiom, even now it’s an axiom for me! What is it that’s lying there in the other room: truth is truth, and even Mill⁸ himself can do nothing about it! And a woman who loves, oh, a woman who loves—will deify even the vices, even the villainies of the beloved being. He himself wouldn’t seek out such justifications for his villainies as she will find for him. This is magnanimous, but unoriginal. Woman has been ruined by unoriginality alone. And what, I repeat, what are you pointing to there on the table? Is that original, what’s there on the table? Ohh!

Listen: I was sure of her love then. And she did throw herself on my neck then. So she loved me, or rather—wished to love. Yes, that’s how it was: she wished to love, she sought to love. And the main thing is that there were no such villainies for which she would have to seek justifications. You say: a pawnbroker, and everybody says it. But what if I am a pawnbroker? It means there are reasons, if the most magnanimous of men became a pawnbroker. You see, gentlemen, there are ideas... that is, you see, certain ideas, once they’re uttered, expressed in words, come out terribly stupid. They come out shameful for oneself. And why? No why. Because we’re all trash and can’t bear the truth, or else I don’t know why. I said “the most magnanimous of men” just now. It’s ridiculous, and yet that’s how it was. That was the truth, that is, the most, the very most truthful truth! Yes, I *had the right* then to want to provide for myself and to open this pawnshop: “You rejected me, you people, that is, you drove me away with scornful silence. To my passionate impulse toward you, you responded by offending me for the rest of my life. Now, therefore, I had the right to protect myself from you with a wall, to raise these thirty thousand roubles and end my life somewhere in the Crimea, on the southern coast, amid mountains and vineyards, on my own estate, bought with this thirty thousand, and, above all, far away from all of you, but without spite toward you, with an ideal in my soul, with a beloved woman by my heart, with a family, should God send it, and—helping out the neighboring settlers.” Naturally, it’s good that I’m now saying this to myself, but what could have been stupider than if I had then painted it aloud for her? Hence the proud silence, hence the silent sitting. Because what could she have understood? Sixteen years, early youth—what could she understand of my justifications, my sufferings? Here was straightforwardness, ignorance of life, cheap youthful convictions, the chicken’s blindness of “beautiful hearts,” and, above all, here was the pawnshop, and—*basta!* (But was I a villain in the pawnshop, didn’t she see how I acted and whether I took too much?) Oh, how terrible is the truth on earth! This lovely one, this meek one, this heaven—she was a tyrant, an unbearable tyrant and tormentor of my soul! I’ll slander myself if I don’t say it! You think I didn’t love her? Who can say I didn’t love her? You see: there was irony here, a wicked irony of fate and nature came out here! We’re cursed, the life of men generally is cursed! (Mine in particular!) I understand now that I did make some mistake here! Something here didn’t come out right. Everything was clear, my plan was clear as the sky: “Stern, proud, and needs nobody’s moral consolation, suffers silently.” That’s how it was, I wasn’t lying, I wasn’t lying! “She herself will see afterward that there was magnanimity here, only she failed to notice it—and once she realizes it someday, she’ll appreciate it ten times more, and will fall down in the dust with her hands clasped in entreaty.” That was the plan. But I forgot something here, or lost sight of it. There was something here I failed to do. But enough, enough. And of whom shall I now ask forgiveness? What’s finished is finished. Take heart, man, and be proud! It’s not your fault!...

So, then, I’ll tell the truth, I won’t be afraid to stand face-to-face with the truth: it was *her* fault, *her* fault!...

V THE MEEK ONE REBELS

The quarrels began with her suddenly deciding to lend money in her own way, to appraise things above their value, and she even deigned a couple of times to enter into a dispute with me on the subject. I didn’t agree. But here the captain’s widow turned up.

An old woman, a captain’s widow, came with a locket—a present from her late husband, well, the usual thing, a keepsake. I gave her thirty roubles. She started whining pathetically, begging me not to let the thing go—naturally, I won’t let it go. Well, in short, suddenly, five days later, she comes to exchange it for a bracelet that isn’t worth even eight roubles. Naturally, I rejected it. She must have guessed something right then from my wife’s eyes, but anyway she came when I wasn’t there and my wife exchanged the locket for her.

Finding out that same day, I began speaking meekly, but firmly and reasonably. She was sitting on the bed looking down, tapping the rug with her right toe (her gesture); there was a bad smile on her lips. Then, without raising my voice at all, I declared calmly that the money was *mine*, that I had the right to look at life with *my own* eyes, and—that when I invited her into my home, I had not concealed anything from her.

She suddenly jumped up, suddenly trembled all over, and—what do you think?—suddenly stamped her feet at me; this was a beast, this was a fit, this was a beast in a fit. I froze in astonishment; I never expected such an escapade. But I was not put out, I didn't even stir, and again in the same calm voice declared to her directly that from then on I was depriving her of her participation in my concerns. She burst out laughing in my face and left the apartment.

The thing was that she had no right to leave the apartment. Nowhere without me, that was the agreement while she was still my fiancée. Toward evening she came back. Not a word from me.

The next day she was gone again from morning on, and the day after. I locked my shop and went to the aunts. I had broken with them right after the wedding—they never visited me, nor I them. It now turned out that she hadn't been there. They listened to me with curiosity and laughed in my face: "Serves you right," they said. But I had anticipated their laughter. I straightaway bribed the maiden aunt, the younger one, with a hundred roubles, and gave her twenty-five up front. Two days later she comes to me: "An officer," she says, "Yefimovich, a sub-lieutenant, your former regimental comrade, is mixed up in it." I was very amazed. This Yefimovich had caused me the most evil in the regiment, and a month ago had come to my shop once and then again, shameless as he was, on the pretext of pawning something, and, I remember, had begun laughing with my wife. I went up to him right then and told him that he dared not come to me, remembering our relations; but no such notion ever entered my head, I simply thought he was a brazen fellow. And now suddenly the aunt informs me that she has already set up a meeting with him and that the whole thing is being handled by a former acquaintance of the aunts, Yulia Samsonovna, a widow, and a colonel's widow at that—"It's to her that your spouse now goes," she says.

I'll cut this picture short. The business cost me all of three hundred roubles, but in two days it was arranged so that I would be standing in the next room, behind a closed door, listening to the first rendezvous of my wife alone with Yefimovich. In anticipation, on the eve, a brief but, for me, all too portentous scene took place between us.

She came back toward evening, sat on the bed, looking at me mockingly and tapping the rug with her little foot. As I looked at her, the idea flew into my head that for the whole past month, or, better, the past two weeks, she had not been quite in her own character, one might even say it was the opposite character: what showed was a violent, aggressive being, I wouldn't say shameless, but disorderly and seeking confusion herself. Inviting confusion. Her meekness, however, got in the way. When such a one gets violent, even if she leaps beyond all measure, you can still see that she's only breaking herself, is egging herself on, and that she herself will be the first to be unable to manage her own sense of integrity and shame. That's why her sort sometimes leap much too far beyond measure, so that you don't believe your own observing mind. The soul accustomed to depravity, on the other hand, will always soften things, making them more vile, but in the guise of an order and decency that claim superiority over you.

"And is it true that you were thrown out of your regiment because you were scared to fight a duel?" she asked suddenly, out of the blue, and her eyes flashed.

"It's true. On the decision of the officers, I was asked to withdraw from the regiment, though, anyhow, I myself had already sent in my resignation before then."

"Thrown out as a coward?"

"Yes, they judged me a coward. But I refused the duel not because I was a coward, but because I did not wish to submit to their tyrannical decision and challenge a man when I myself did not feel any offense. You know," I couldn't help myself here, "that to rise up actively against such tyranny and accept all the consequences was to show much greater courage than in any duel you like."

I couldn't help it, with this phrase I began as if justifying myself; that was just what she needed, this new humiliation of me. She laughed maliciously:

"And is it true that after that you wandered the streets of Petersburg for three years, as a vagabond, begging for kopecks and sleeping under billiard tables?"

"I also happened to spend nights in the Haymarket and in Vyazemsky's house.⁹ Yes, it's true; after the regiment, there was much disgrace and degradation in my life, but not moral degradation, because I was the first to hate my actions even then. It was only the degradation of my will and mind, and was caused only by the desperateness of my situation. But that has passed..."

"Oh, now you're somebody—a financier!"

That is, a hint at the pawnshop. But I had already managed to control myself. I saw that she desired explanations humiliating to me and—I didn't give them. A client opportunely rang the bell, and I went out to him in the big room. Afterward, an hour later, when she suddenly got dressed to go out, she stopped in front of me and said:

"You told me nothing about it before the wedding, however."

I did not reply, and she left.

And so, the next day I stood in that room behind the door and listened to how my fate was being decided, and in my pocket there was a revolver. She was dressed up and sitting at the table, and Yefimovich was clowning in front of her. And what then: the outcome was (I say it to my credit), the outcome was just exactly what I anticipated and expected—though without being aware that I was anticipating and expecting it. I don't know whether I've expressed myself clearly.

The outcome was this. I listened for a whole hour, and for a whole hour I was witness to a combat between a most noble and lofty woman and a depraved, dull-witted society creature with a reptilian soul. And where, I thought, amazed, where did she, this naive, this meek, this taciturn woman, get to know all that? The wittiest author of high-society comedies would have been unable to create this scene of mockery, the most naive laughter, and the holy disdain of virtue for vice. And so much brilliance in her words and little phrases; such sharpness in her quick responses, such truth in her condemnation! And at the same time so much of an almost girlish simple-heartedness. She laughed in his face at his declarations of love, at his gestures, at his offers. Having come with crude assault in mind and anticipating no resistance,

he suddenly wilted. At first I might have thought it was simply her coquetry here—"the coquetry of a depraved but witty being, to put on a more costly show." But no, the truth shone like the sun, and it was impossible to doubt it. Only out of hatred toward me, affected and impulsive, could she, so inexperienced, have ventured upon this meeting, but as soon as it came to business—her eyes were opened at once. Here was simply a creature thrashing about, so as to insult me in any way possible, but, having decided upon such filth, she could not bear the disorder. And how could she, so pure and sinless, she, with her ideal, be tempted by Yefimovich or anyone else you like among these high-society creatures? On the contrary, he could only make her laugh. The whole truth rose from her soul, and indignation called up sarcasm from her heart. I repeat, toward the end this buffoon was quite withered and sat scowling and barely responding, so that I began to be afraid he might risk insulting her out of base vengeance. And I repeat again: to my credit, I heard the scene out almost without astonishment. As if I had encountered only what I knew. As if I had gone so as to encounter it. I had gone believing nothing, no accusation, though I did put a revolver in my pocket—that is the truth! And how could I have imagined her different? Why, then, did I love her, why did I esteem her, why had I married her? Oh, of course, I satisfied myself only too well as to how much she hated me then, but I also satisfied myself as to how chaste she was. I stopped the scene suddenly by opening the door. Yefimovich jumped up, I took her by the hand and invited her to leave with me. Yefimovich quickly recovered and suddenly burst into a ringing and rolling guffaw.

"Oh, I won't oppose the sacred rights of matrimony, take her, take her! And you know," he shouted after me, "though it's not possible for a decent man to fight a duel with you, still, out of respect for your lady, I'm at your service... If you'll risk it, that is..."

"Do you hear!" I stopped her on the threshold for a moment.

After that not a word all the way home. I led her by the hand, and she didn't resist. On the contrary, she was terribly struck, but only till home. Having come home, she sat down on a chair and fixed her eyes on me. She was extremely pale; though mockery formed on her lips at once, her look was solemnly and severely challenging, and it seemed she was seriously convinced in the first moments that I was going to kill her with the revolver. But I silently took the revolver out of my pocket and put it on the table. She looked at me and at the revolver. (Note this: the revolver was familiar to her. I had had it and kept it loaded ever since I opened the pawnshop. On opening the pawnshop, I had decided not to keep any huge dogs, or a muscular lackey, as Moser, for instance, does. My clients are let in by the cook. But it's impossible for someone occupied with this trade to go without self-protection, just in case, and so I kept a loaded revolver. In the first days after she entered my house, she got very interested in this revolver, asked questions, and I even explained the mechanism and system to her, and besides that, persuaded her once to shoot at a target. Note all that.) Paying no attention to her frightened look, I lay down half undressed on the bed. I was completely worn out; it was already nearly eleven o'clock. She went on sitting in the same place, without stirring, for about an hour longer, then put out the candle and lay down, also dressed, by the wall, on the sofa. The first time she didn't lie down with me—note that as well...

VI A TERRIBLE MEMORY

Now, this terrible memory ...

I woke up in the morning, between seven and eight, I think, and it was already almost completely light in the room. I woke up all at once with full consciousness and suddenly opened my eyes. She was standing by the table holding the revolver in her hand. She didn't see that I was awake and watching. And suddenly I see her start moving toward me with the revolver in her hand. I quickly closed my eyes and pretended to be fast asleep.

She came to the bed and stood over me. I heard everything; and though a dead silence fell, I heard that silence. Here a convulsive movement occurred—and suddenly, irresistibly, against my will, I opened my eyes. She was looking at me, right into my eyes, and the revolver was already at my temple. Our eyes met. But we looked at each other for no more than a moment. I forcibly closed my eyes again, and at the same moment decided with all my strength of soul that I would not stir or open my eyes again, no matter what lay ahead of me.

In fact, it does happen that a deeply sleeping man suddenly opens his eyes, even raises his head for a second and looks around the room, and then, after a moment, unconsciously lays his head back on the pillow and falls asleep, remembering nothing.

When I, having met her gaze and felt the revolver at my temple, suddenly closed my eyes again and did not stir, like a man fast asleep—she decidedly could have supposed that I was in fact sleeping and had seen nothing, the more so as it was quite incredible for someone, after seeing what I had seen, to close his eyes again at *such* a moment.

Yes, incredible. But even so she might have guessed the truth—it was this that suddenly flashed through my mind, still in that same moment. Oh, what a whirlwind of thoughts and feelings swept through my mind in less than a moment, and long live the electricity of human thought! In that case (so I felt), if she had guessed the truth and knew I was not asleep, then I had already crushed her by my readiness to accept death, and her hand might now falter. The former resolution might be dashed against the new extraordinary impression. They say that people standing on a high place are as if drawn down of themselves into the abyss. I think many suicides and murders have been committed only because the revolver has already been taken in hand. Here, too, is an abyss; here, too, is a forty-five-degree slope, down which you cannot help sliding, and something invincibly challenges you to pull the trigger. But the awareness that I had seen everything, knew everything, and was silently awaiting death from her—might keep her from the slope.

The silence continued, and suddenly at my temple, through my hair, I felt the cold touch of steel. You may ask: did I have any firm hope of salvation? I'll answer you as before God: I had no hope, except perhaps for one chance in a hundred. Why, then, did I accept death? But I will ask: what did I mean life for after that revolver, raised against me by the being I adored? Besides, I knew with all the strength of my being that at that very moment a fight was going on between us, a terrible life-and-death combat, the combat of that same coward of yesterday, driven out by his comrades for cowardice. I knew it, and she knew it, if only she had guessed the truth that I was not asleep.

Maybe this isn't so, maybe I didn't think that then, but it had to be so even without thinking, because all I did afterward, in every hour of my life, was think of it.

But again you will ask a question: why did I not save her from evil-doing? Oh, I asked myself this question a thousand times afterward—every time that, with a chill in my spine, I recalled that second. But my soul was in dark despair then: I was perishing, I was perishing myself, could I have saved anyone else? And how do you know whether I wanted to save anyone then? Who knows what I might have felt then?

My consciousness, however, was seething; seconds passed, there was dead silence; she was still standing over me—and suddenly I shivered with hope! I quickly opened my eyes. She was no longer in the room. I got up: I was victorious—and she was forever defeated!

I came out to have tea. The samovar was always served in the front room, and she always poured tea. I sat down at the table silently and accepted the glass of tea from her. After about five minutes I glanced at her. She was terribly pale, still paler than yesterday, and was looking at me. And suddenly—and suddenly, seeing that I was looking at her, she smiled palely with her pale lips, a timid question in her eyes. “That means she's still in doubt and is asking herself: does he know or doesn't he, did he see or didn't he?” I looked away indifferently. After tea I locked the shop, went to the market, and bought an iron bed and a screen. Coming home, I ordered the bed put in the big room and partitioned off with the screen. It was a bed for her, but I didn't say a word to her. Even without words she understood from this bed that I “had seen and knew everything” and that there was no longer any doubt. I left the revolver on the table for the night, as usual. At night she silently lay down on this new bed: the marriage was dissolved, she was “defeated, but not forgiven.” During the night she became delirious, and by morning was in a fever. She lay ill for six weeks.

CHAPTER TWO

I THE DREAM OF PRIDE

L UKERYA HAS just announced that she's not going to live with me, and once the lady is buried, she's quitting. I prayed on my knees for five minutes, and wanted to pray for an hour, but I kept thinking, thinking, and my thoughts are all sick, and my head is sick—what's the point of praying—nothing but sin! It's also strange that I don't want to sleep: in great, in all too great grief, after the first very strong outbursts, one always wants to sleep. They say those condemned to death sleep extremely soundly on their last night. That's how it should be, it's according to nature, otherwise one's strength would fail... I lay down on the sofa, but didn't fall asleep ...

... For the six weeks of her illness then, we looked after her day and night—I, Lukerya, and a trained nurse from the hospital, whom I had hired. I didn't spare the money, and I even wanted to spend on her. I invited Dr. Schroeder and paid him ten roubles per visit. When she regained consciousness, I tried to keep out of her sight. But, anyhow, what am I describing. When she was on her feet completely, she quietly and silently sat in my room at a special table, which I also bought for her at that time... Yes, it's true, we were perfectly silent; that is, we started talking later, but—all ordinary things. I, of course, purposely did not become expansive, but I noticed very well that she, too, was as if glad not to say an extra word. I thought this perfectly natural on her part: "She's too shaken and defeated," I thought, "and, of course, she must be allowed to forget and get used to it." In this fashion we kept silent, but every minute I was preparing myself for the future. I thought she was doing the same, and it was terribly entertaining for me to keep guessing: precisely what is she thinking about now?

I'll say more: oh, of course, no one knows how much I endured, lamenting over her during her illness. But I lamented to myself, and suppressed the groans in my breast even from Lukerya. I couldn't imagine, couldn't even suppose, that she might die without having learned everything. But when she was out of danger and her health began to return—this I remember—I quickly and very much calmed down. What's more, I decided to *postpone our future* for as long as possible, and meanwhile leave everything in its present way. Yes, something strange and particular—I don't know what else to call it—happened to me then: I was triumphant and the consciousness of it in itself proved perfectly sufficient for me. So the whole winter passed. Oh, I was pleased as I had never been before, and that for the whole winter.

You see: in my life there was one terrible external circumstance, which until then, that is, until that very catastrophe with my wife, had weighed on me every day and every hour—namely, the loss of my reputation and this retirement from the regiment. In two words: there had been a tyrannical injustice against me. True, my comrades disliked me for my difficult character—my ridiculous character, perhaps—though it often happens that what is most sublime for you, what is cherished and revered by you, at the same time for some reason makes the crowd of your comrades laugh. Oh, I was never liked, even at school. Never and nowhere was I liked. Lukerya is also unable to like me. The incident with the regiment, though a consequence of the dislike for me, was undoubtedly of an accidental character. I say that because there is nothing more offensive and insufferable than to perish from an accident that might or might not have happened, from an unfortunate conglomeration of circumstances that might have passed over like a cloud. For an intellectual being it is humiliating. The accident was as follows.

During intermission at the theater, I stepped out to the buffet. The hussar A——v, suddenly coming in, began loudly telling two fellow hussars, in the presence of other officers and the public, that Captain Bezumtsev of our regiment had just caused a scandal in the corridor, "and appears to be drunk." The conversation did not catch on, and the whole thing was a mistake, because Captain Bezumtsev was not drunk, and the scandal was in fact no scandal. The hussars started talking about other things, and that was the end of it, but next day the story penetrated our regiment, and right away they started talking about me being the only one from our regiment who was in the buffet, and when the hussar A——v made an impudent reference to Captain Bezumtsev, I did not go up to A——v and stop him with a rebuke. But why on earth should I? If he had a bone to pick with Bezumtsev, that was their personal affair, and why should I get involved in it? Meanwhile the officers began to say that the affair was not personal, but also concerned the regiment, and since of the officers of our regiment I was the only one there, I had thus proved to all the other officers and the public in the buffet that there could be officers of our regiment who were not so ticklish about honor—their own or that of their regiment. I could not agree with such a finding. I was given to know that I could still mend everything, if even now, late though it was, I should wish to have a formal talk with A——v. I did not wish to do that and, being annoyed, proudly refused. Right after that I handed in my resignation—that's the whole story. I came out proud, but crushed in spirit. My will and reason collapsed. Just then it also happened that my sister's husband in Moscow squandered our small fortune, including my share of it—a tiny share, but I was left penniless in the street. I could have taken a private position, but I didn't: after a splendid uniform, I couldn't work somewhere in railways. And so—if it's shame, let it be shame, if it's disgrace, let it be disgrace, if it's degradation, let it be degradation, and the worse the better—that's what I chose. Here follow three years of dark memories and even Vyazemsky's house. A year and a half ago a rich old woman, my godmother, died in Moscow, unexpectedly leaving me, among others, three thousand in her will. I thought a little and thereupon decided my fate. I decided on a pawnshop, without begging people's pardon: money, then a corner, and—a new life far away from old memories—that was the plan. Nevertheless the dark past and the forever ruined reputation of my honor oppressed me every hour, every minute. But here I got married. Accidentally or not—I don't know. But in bringing her into my house, I thought I was bringing a friend, and I needed a friend so very much. But I saw clearly that

the friend had to be prepared, completed, and even won over. And how could I explain anything just like that to a sixteen-year-old and prejudiced girl? For instance, how could I, without the accidental help of this terrible catastrophe with the revolver, convince her that I was not a coward, and that I had been unjustly accused of cowardice in the regiment? But the catastrophe came just pat. Having withstood the revolver, I had revenged myself on my whole gloomy past. And though no one knew of it, *she* did, and that was everything for me, because she herself was everything for me, all my hope for the future in my dreams! She was the only person I was preparing for myself, and there was no need for any other—and now she knew everything; at least she knew that she had hastened unjustly to join my enemies. This thought delighted me. I could no longer be a scoundrel in her eyes, perhaps only an odd person, but after what had happened, I did not dislike this thought all that much: oddity is no vice, on the contrary, it sometimes attracts the feminine character. In short, I deliberately put off the denouement: what had happened was, for the moment, quite sufficient for my peace and contained quite enough pictures and material for my dreams. The nasty part of it is that I'm a dreamer: the material was enough for me, and as for her, I thought she could *wait*.

So the whole winter went by in some expectation of something. I liked to steal a look at her when she was sitting, as usual, at her table. She was busy with handwork, with linens, and in the evening she sometimes read books that she took from my bookcase. The selection of books in it also should have testified in my favor. She hardly ever went anywhere. Toward evening, after dinner, I took her for a walk each day, and we got our exercise; but not in perfect silence as before. I precisely tried to pretend that we were not being silent and talked agreeably, but, as I've already said, we both did it in such a way as not to be too expansive. I did it on purpose, and she, I thought, had to be "given time." Of course, it's strange that it never once occurred to me, almost till the end of winter, that while I liked looking at her in secret, I never once caught her glancing at me that whole winter! I thought it was her timidity. Besides, she had a look of such timid meekness, such strengthlessness after her illness. No, better to wait it out and—"and she herself will suddenly come to you..."

This thought delighted me irresistibly. I will add only that at times I excited myself as if on purpose and actually brought my mind and spirit to a point where I felt offended by her. And so it continued for some time. Yet my hatred could never ripen and settle in my soul. And I felt myself that it was as if only a game. And even when I dissolved the marriage and brought the bed and screen, I still could never, never see her as a criminal. And not because I took a light-minded view of her crime, but because I had had the intention of forgiving her completely from the very first day, even before I bought the bed. In short, it was an oddity on my part, for I am morally strict. On the contrary, in my eyes she was so defeated, so humiliated, so crushed, that I sometimes pitied her painfully, though for all that I sometimes decidedly liked the idea of her humiliation. It was the idea of our inequality that I liked ...

That winter I happened deliberately to do several good deeds. I forgave two debts, I gave one poor woman money without any pledge. And I did not tell my wife about it, and I did it not at all so that my wife would find out; but the woman herself came to thank me, all but on her knees. So it became known; it seemed to me that she was actually pleased to learn about the woman.

But spring was coming, it was already the middle of April, the storm windows had been taken down, and bright sheaves of sunlight began to light up our silent rooms. Yet a veil hung before me and blinded my reason. A fatal, terrible veil! How did it happen that it all suddenly fell from my eyes, and I suddenly recovered my sight and understood everything! Was it an accident, or had the appointed day come, or did a ray of sun light up the thought and the answer in my stupefied mind? No, there was no thought or answer here, but here suddenly some nerve began to play, some nerve, grown numb, began to tremble and came alive and lit up my whole stupefied soul and my demonic pride. Just as if I'd suddenly jumped up from my seat then. And it did happen suddenly and unexpectedly. It happened toward evening, at five o'clock after dinner.

II THE VEIL SUDDENLY FELL

A couple of words first. Already a month ago I noticed a strange pensiveness in her, not silence now, but real pensiveness. This, too, I noticed suddenly. She was sitting over her work then, her head bent to her sewing, and didn't see that I was looking at her. And right then it suddenly struck me that she had become so thin, so slender, her little face pale, her lips white—all that, as a whole, together with the pensiveness, struck me extremely and all at once. Even before then I had heard a dry little cough, especially at night. I got up at once and went to invite Schroeder to come, telling her nothing.

Schroeder came the next day. She was very surprised and kept looking first at Schroeder and then at me.

"But I'm well," she said, with a vague smile.

Schroeder did not examine her much (these medical men are haughtily careless at times), and only told me in the other room that it was a leftover from her illness and that come spring it wouldn't be a bad idea to go somewhere to the sea, or if that was impossible, simply to take a country house. In short, he said nothing except that there was weakness or some such thing. When Schroeder left, she suddenly said to me again, looking at me terribly seriously:

"I'm quite, quite well."

But having said this, she straightaway blushed all at once, apparently with shame. Apparently, it was shame. Oh, now I understand: she was ashamed that I was still *her husband*, looking after her, still as if I were a real husband. But I didn't understand it then and ascribed her color to humility (the veil!).

And then, a month after that, between four and five o'clock, in April, on a bright sunny day, I was sitting in my shop making calculations. Suddenly I heard her, in our room, at her table, at her work, softly, softly... singing. This novelty produced a tremendous impression on me, and to this day I haven't understood it. Up to then I'd hardly ever heard her sing, except in the very first days, when I brought her into my house and we could still frolic, shooting at a target with the revolver. Then her voice was still rather strong, ringing, though unsteady, but terribly pleasant and healthy. Now, however, her little song was so feeble—oh, not that it was plaintive (it was some romance), but in her voice there was

something as if cracked, broken, as if her little voice couldn't manage it, as if the song itself were sick. She was singing in a half voice, and suddenly, after rising, the voice broke off—such a poor little voice, and it broke off so pitifully; she coughed and again softly, softly, barely, barely began to sing...

My alarm will be laughed at, but no one will ever understand why I was so alarmed! No, I wasn't sorry for her yet, it was something quite different as yet. To begin with, at least in the first minutes, there suddenly came perplexity and terrible astonishment, terrible and strange, painful and almost vengeful. "She's singing, and with me here! *Has she forgotten about me, or what?*"

All shaken, I sat where I was, then suddenly got up, took my hat, and walked out, as if uncomprehending. At least I don't know why or where. Lukerya started helping me with my coat.

"She sings?" I said to Lukerya involuntarily. She didn't understand and stared at me, continuing not to understand; however, it was actually impossible to understand me.

"Is it the first time she's singing?"

"No, she sometimes sings when you're out," Lukerya replied.

I remember everything. I went down the stairs, walked out, and let my feet take me wherever they wanted to go. I walked as far as the corner and began staring somewhere. People were passing by, pushing me, I didn't feel it. I hailed a cab and told the driver to go to the Police Bridge, I don't know why. But then I suddenly dropped him and gave him twenty kopecks:

"It's for having bothered you," I said, laughing to him senselessly, but in my heart some sort of rapture suddenly began.

I turned toward home, quickening my pace. The cracked, poor, broken little note suddenly began to ring again in my soul. I was breathless. The veil was falling, falling from my eyes! If she'd begun singing with me there, it meant she'd forgotten about me—that's what was clear and terrible. This my heart felt. Yet rapture shone in my soul and overcame fear.

Oh, the irony of fate! There was and could have been nothing else in my soul all winter except this very rapture, but where had I myself been all winter? Had I been there with my soul? I ran up the stairs in great haste, I don't know whether I walked in timidly. I remember only that the whole floor was as if undulating and I was as if floating on a river. I walked into the room, she was sitting in the same place, sewing, her head bent, but no longer singing. She gave me a passing, uncurious glance—not a glance, but merely the gesture, ordinary and indifferent, when someone comes into a room.

I went straight over to her and sat down on a chair right beside her, like a crazy man. She gave me a quick look, as if frightened: I took her hand, and I don't remember what I said to her, that is, wanted to say, because I couldn't even speak properly. My voice faltered and wouldn't obey me. And I didn't know what to say, only I was suffocating.

"Let's talk... you know... say something!" I suddenly babbled some stupid thing—oh, as if intelligence was the point! She gave another start and drew back in great fright, looking me in the face, but suddenly—*stern astonishment* showed in her eyes. Yes, astonishment, and it was *stern*. She was looking at me with big eyes. This sternness, this stern astonishment, all at once demolished me: "So you also want love? Love?"—this astonishment as if suddenly asked, though she was silent. But I could read everything, everything. Everything in me shook, and I simply collapsed at her feet. Yes, I fell at her feet. She quickly jumped up, but with extraordinary strength I held her back by both hands.

And I fully understood my despair, oh, I understood it! But, would you believe, rapture was seething in my heart so irrepressibly that I thought I would die. I was kissing her feet in ecstasy and happiness. Yes, in happiness, boundless and endless, and that while understanding all my hopeless despair! I was weeping, I was saying something, yet I couldn't speak. Fright and astonishment were suddenly replaced in her by some worried thought, an extraordinary question, and she looked at me strangely, wildly even, she wanted to understand something very quickly, and she smiled. She was terribly ashamed that I was kissing her feet, and she kept pulling them away, but I at once kissed the place on the floor where her foot had been. She saw that and suddenly started laughing from shame (you know how one can laugh from shame). Hysterics were coming, I could see that, her hands twitched—I wasn't thinking about that and kept mumbling to her that I loved her, that I wouldn't get up, "let me kiss your dress... let me worship you like this all my life..." I don't know, I don't remember—and suddenly she began sobbing and shaking; a terrible fit of hysterics came. I had frightened her.

I carried her over to the bed. When the fit passed, she sat up on the bed, seized my hands with a terribly crushed look, and begged me to calm down: "Enough, don't torment yourself, calm down!"—and again she started weeping. All that evening I never left her side. I kept telling her I'd take her to Boulogne¹⁰ to swim in the sea, now, at once, in two weeks, that she had such a cracked little voice, I'd heard it that day; that I'd close the shop, sell it to Dobronravov, that everything would begin anew, and, above all, to Boulogne, to Boulogne! She listened and kept being afraid. Kept being more and more afraid. But for me the main thing was not that, but that the desire kept growing greater and more irrepressible in me to lie at her feet again, and again to kiss, to kiss the ground on which her feet stood, and to worship her and—"nothing more, I'll ask nothing more of you," I kept repeating every moment, "don't answer me anything, don't notice me at all, just let me look at you from the corner, turn me into a thing of yours, into a little dog..." She was weeping.

"*And I thought you'd just let me stay like that,*" suddenly escaped her involuntarily, so involuntarily that she perhaps didn't notice at all how she had said it, and yet—oh, this was her most important, her most fatal phrase, the clearest for me that evening, and it was as if my heart was slashed by this phrase as by a knife! It explained everything to me, everything, but as long as she was near, before my eyes, I hoped irresistibly and was terribly happy. Oh, I made her terribly weary that evening, and I understood that, but I was constantly thinking I was going to remake it all right then! Finally, toward nighttime, she became totally strengthless, I convinced her to go to sleep, and she fell asleep at once, soundly. I expected delirium, there was delirium, but very little. During the night I got up almost every minute and went quietly in my slippers to look at her. I wrung my hands over her, looking at this sick being on this poor little cot, the iron bed I had bought for her then for three roubles. I knelt down, but didn't dare to kiss the sleeper's feet (without her will!).

I'd start praying to God, but would jump up again. Lukerya watched me closely and kept coming in from the kitchen. I went to her and told her to go to bed and that the next day "something quite different" would begin.

And I believed it blindly, insanely, terribly. Oh, rapture, rapture flooded me! I was only waiting for the next day. Above all, I did not believe in any calamity, despite the symptoms. Sense had not fully returned, despite the fallen veil, and it took a long, long time to return—oh, till today, till this very day!! And how, how could it return then: why, she was still alive then, she was right there before me, and I before her: "She'll wake up tomorrow, and I'll tell her all this, and she'll see it all." That was my reasoning then, simple and clear—hence the rapture! Above all, there was this trip to Boulogne. I kept thinking for some reason that Boulogne was—everything, that Boulogne contained something definitive. "To Boulogne, to Boulogne!..." I waited insanely for morning.

III I UNDERSTAND ALL TOO WELL

And this was only a few days ago, five days, only five days, last Tuesday! No, no, if she'd only waited a little longer, only a little bit longer, I—I would have dispelled the darkness! And, anyway, didn't she calm down? The very next day she listened to me with a smile now, despite her bewilderment... Above all, throughout this time, all five days, there was bewilderment or shame in her. She was also afraid, very afraid. I won't argue, I'm not going to contradict like some insane person: there was fear, but how could she not be afraid? We'd been strangers to each other for so long, had grown so unused to each other, and suddenly all this... But I didn't consider her fear, the new thing was shining!... True, unquestionably true, I had made a mistake. And maybe even many mistakes. And when we woke up the next day, still that morning (it was Wednesday), I right away suddenly made a mistake: I suddenly made her my friend. I hurried too much, too much, but a confession was needed, was necessary—yes, and much more than a confession! I didn't conceal from her even what I'd been concealing from myself all my life. I said straight out that all I'd done that whole winter was feel certain of her love. I explained to her that the pawnshop was nothing but the degradation of my will and intelligence, a personal idea of self-castigation and self-exaltation. I explained to her that I had actually turned coward in the buffet that time, owing to my character, to insecurity: I was struck by the surroundings, by the buffet; struck by how I was going to come out in this, and wouldn't it come out stupid? I turned coward not at the duel, but that it would come out stupid... And afterward I didn't want to admit it and tormented everyone, and tormented her for it, and that was why I had married her, so as to torment her for it. Generally, I spoke for the most part as if in a fever. She herself took me by the hands and begged me to stop: "You're exaggerating... you're tormenting yourself"—and again the tears would start, again all but fits! She kept begging me not to say any of it, not to remember.

I paid little or no regard to her begging: spring, Boulogne! The sun was there, our new sun was there, that was all I kept saying! I locked the shop, handed the business over to Dobronravov. I suddenly suggested to her that we give everything away to the poor, except for the capital of three thousand inherited from my godmother, which we'd spend on going to Boulogne, then come back and start a new life of labor. So it was decided, because she didn't say anything... she only smiled. And, it seems, she smiled more out of delicacy, so as not to upset me. I did see that I was burdening her, don't think I was so stupid or such an egoist that I didn't see it. I saw everything, everything to the last little feature, I saw and knew it better than anyone else; all my despair stood in full view!

I told her all about me and about her. And about Lukerya. I told her I had wept... Oh, yes, I also changed the subject, I also tried by all means not to remind her of certain things. And she even became animated a couple of times, I remember, I remember! Why do you say that I looked and saw nothing? And if only *this* hadn't happened, everything would have been resurrected. She even told me just two days ago, when the conversation turned to reading and what she'd read that winter—she even told me, laughing as she recalled it, about the scene between Gil Blas and the archbishop of Granada.¹¹ And what childlike laughter, so dear, just as before, when she was my fiancée (one instant! one instant!); how glad I was! I was terribly struck, however, about this archbishop: so she had after all found peace of mind and happiness enough to laugh over the masterpiece as she sat there this winter. So she had already begun to be fully at peace, to believe fully that I would just let her stay *like that*. "I thought you'd just let me stay *like that*"—that's what she had said then on Tuesday! Oh, a ten-year-old girl's thought! And she believed, she did believe that everything would in fact stay *like that*: she at her table, I at mine, and both of us like that till we're sixty years old. And suddenly—here I come, a husband, and a husband in need of love! Oh, incomprehension, oh, my blindness!

It was also a mistake that I looked at her with rapture; I should have restrained myself, because rapture is frightening. But, after all, I did restrain myself, I didn't kiss her feet anymore. I never once showed that... well, that I was a husband—oh, it never even entered my mind, I only worshipped! But it was impossible to be quite silent, it was impossible not to speak at all! I suddenly said to her that I delighted in her conversation and that I considered her incomparably, incomparably better educated and developed than myself. She turned bright red and said abashedly that I was exaggerating. Here, like a fool, unable to help myself, I told her how enraptured I had been when, standing behind the door, I had listened to her combat, the combat of innocence with that creature, and how I had delighted in her intelligence, her sparkling wit, together with such childlike simple-heartedness. She shuddered all over, as it were, tried to murmur again that I was exaggerating, but suddenly her whole face darkened, she covered it with her hands and began to sob... Here I, too, couldn't stand it: I fell down before her again, again started kissing her feet, and again it ended with a fit, the same as on Tuesday. That was last evening, but in the morning ...

In the morning?! Madman, that morning was today, just now, only just now!

Listen and try to fathom: when we came together over the samovar just now (this after yesterday's fit), I was even struck by her calm, that's how it was! And I'd spent the whole night shaking with fear over yesterday. But suddenly she comes up to me, stands in front of me, and, clasping her hands (just now, just now!), began saying to me that she was a criminal, that she knew it, that her crime had tormented her all winter, torments her still... that she values my magnanimity only too highly... "I'll be your faithful wife, I'll respect you..." Here I jumped up like a crazy man and

embraced her! I was kissing her, kissing her face, her lips, like a husband, for the first time after a long separation. And why did I ever leave just now, for only two hours... our passports... Oh, God! Five minutes, if only I'd come back five minutes earlier?... And here this crowd in our gateway, those looks at me... oh, Lord!

Lukerya says (oh, now I'll never let Lukerya go, she knows everything, she was here all winter, she'll tell me everything), she says that when I left the house, and only something like twenty minutes before I came back—she suddenly went into our room to ask the lady something or other, I don't remember, and saw that her icon (that same icon of the Mother of God) had been taken down and was standing in front of her on the table, as if the lady had just been praying before it. "What's the matter, ma'am?" "Nothing, Lukerya, go now... Wait, Lukerya," she went up to her and kissed her. "Are you happy, ma'am?" "Yes, Lukerya." "You should have come to the master long ago, ma'am, to ask forgiveness... Thank God you've made things up." "All right, Lukerya," she says, "you may go, Lukerya," and she smiled, and so strangely. So strangely that Lukerya suddenly went back ten minutes later to look at her: "She was standing by the wall, right by the window, her hand leaning on the wall and her head pressed to it, she was standing like that, thinking. And she was so deep in thought that she didn't hear how I stood and looked at her from the other room. I saw that she was as if smiling—standing, thinking, and smiling. I looked at her, turned quietly, walked out, also thinking to myself, only suddenly I heard the window being opened. I went at once to tell her, 'It's chilly, ma'am, you might catch cold,' and suddenly I see her standing on the windowsill, already standing up straight in the open window, her back to me, holding the icon in her hands. My heart just sank, I shouted: 'My lady, my lady!' She heard me, made as if to turn toward me, then didn't, but took a step, pressed the icon to her breast, and threw herself out the window!"

I only remember that when I came in the gate, she was still warm. Above all, they were all staring at me. First they shouted, but then they suddenly fell silent and everyone makes way for me and... and she's lying there with the icon. I remember, as if through darkness, that I went up silently and looked for a long time, and everyone surrounded me, saying something to me. Lukerya was there, but I didn't see her. She says she spoke to me. I remember only that tradesman: he kept shouting to me that "a handful of blood came out of her mouth, a handful, a handful!" and showing me the blood right there on the stone. It seems I touched the blood with my finger, got it on my finger, looked at it (I remember that), while he kept telling me: "A handful, a handful!"

"And what of this handful?" I screamed, so they say, at the top of my lungs, raised my arms, and hurled myself at him ...
Oh, wild, wild! Incomprehension! Implausibility! Impossibility!

IV I WAS ONLY FIVE MINUTES LATE

Or not so? Is it plausible? Can you say it's possible? Why, for what reason, did this woman die?

Oh, believe me, I understand; but what she died for—is still a question. She got frightened of my love, asked herself seriously: to accept or not to accept, and couldn't bear the question, and preferred to die. I know, I know, there's no point racking one's brain: she made too many promises, got frightened that she couldn't keep them—it's clear. Here there are several quite terrible circumstances.

Because what did she die for? The question still stands. The question throbs, it's throbbing in my brain. I would even have let her stay *like that*, if she'd wanted it to stay *like that*. She didn't believe it, that's what! No—no, I'm lying, that's not it at all. Simply because with me it had to be honest; if it's love, it must be total love, and not like the love of some merchant. And since she was too chaste, too pure to consent to the kind of love a merchant needs, she didn't want to deceive me. Didn't want to deceive me with half love, under the guise of love, or with quarter love. Too honest she was, that's what, sirs! I wanted to implant breadth of heart in her, remember? A strange thought.

I'm terribly curious: did she respect me? I don't know, did she despise me or not? I don't think she did. It's terribly strange: why did it never occur to me, during the whole winter, that she despised me? I was in the highest degree certain of the opposite, until that very moment when she looked at me with *stern astonishment*. *Stern*, precisely. Then I understood at once that she despised me. Understood irrevocably, for all eternity! Ah, let her, let her despise me, even all her life, but—let her live, live! Just now she still walked, talked. I don't understand at all how she could throw herself out the window! And how could I have supposed it even five minutes before? I've called Lukerya. I won't let Lukerya go now for anything, not for anything!

Oh, we could still have come to some agreement. We only got terribly unused to each other over the winter, but couldn't we have got accustomed again? Why, why couldn't we have come together and begun a new life again? I'm magnanimous, so is she—there's the point of connection! A few words more, two days, no longer, and she'd have understood everything.

Above all, the pity is that it was all chance—simple, barbaric, insensate chance. That's the pity of it! Five minutes is all, I was only five minutes late! If I'd come five minutes earlier—the moment would have flown over like a cloud, and would never have entered her head afterward. And it would have ended with her understanding everything. And now again empty rooms, again I'm alone. There's the pendulum ticking, it doesn't care, it's not sorry for anything. No one's here—that's the trouble!

I pace, I keep pacing. I know, I know, don't prompt me: you find it ridiculous that I complain about chance and about five minutes? But it's obvious here. Consider one thing: she didn't even leave a note saying something like "blame no one for my death," as they all do. Couldn't she have considered that they might even give Lukerya trouble: "You were the only one with her, so it was you who pushed her." At the least, they'd be pestering her for no reason, if four people in the courtyard hadn't seen from windows in the wing and from the courtyard how she stood with the icon in her hands and threw herself down. But this, too, is chance, that people were standing there and saw it. No, all this is a moment, just one unaccountable moment. Suddenness and fantasy! So what if she prayed before the icon? That doesn't mean it was before death. The whole moment lasted maybe only some ten minutes, the whole decision—precisely as she was standing by the

wall, her head leaning on her hand, and smiling. The thought flew into her head, whirled around, and—and she couldn't resist it.

There's an obvious misunderstanding here, like it or not. She still could have lived with me. And what if it was anemia? Simply from anemia, from an exhaustion of vital energy? She got tired over the winter, that's what...

I was late!!!

How thin she is in the coffin, how sharp her little nose is! Her eyelashes lie like little points. And how she fell—didn't crush, didn't break anything! Only this "handful of blood." A teaspoon, that is. Internal concussion. A strange thought: if only it were possible not to bury her? Because if she's taken away, then... oh, no, it's almost impossible that she'll be taken away! Oh, I know they must take her away, I'm not crazy and not raving at all, on the contrary, never before has my mind shone so—but how can it be that again there's no one in the house, again two rooms, and again myself alone with the pledges. Raving, raving, there's where the raving is! I wore her out—that's what!

What are your laws to me now? What do I need your customs, your morals, your life, your state, your faith for? Let your judge judge me, let them take me to court, to your public court, and I'll say I recognize nothing. The judge will shout: "Silence, officer!" But I'll shout back at him: "Where did you get such power now that I should obey you? Why did dark insensateness smash what is dearest of all? Why do I need your laws now? I separate myself." Oh, it makes no difference to me!

Blind, blind! Dead, she doesn't hear! You don't know what paradise I'd have surrounded you with. Paradise was in my soul, I'd have planted it all around you! Well, so you wouldn't love me—let it be, what of it? Everything would be *like that*, everything would stay *like that*. You'd tell me things as you would a friend—and we'd be joyful, and we'd laugh joyfully looking into each other's eyes. And so we'd live. And even if you came to love someone else—well, let it be, let it be! You'd walk with him and laugh, and I'd watch from the other side of the street... Oh, let it all be, only let her open her eyes at least once! For one moment, only one! she'd look at me as she did just now, when she stood in front of me and swore to be my faithful wife! Oh, in one look she'd understand everything.

Insensateness! Oh, nature! People are alone on the earth—that's the trouble! "Is there a living man on the field?" the Russian warrior cries. I, too, though not a warrior, cry out, and no one answers. They say the sun gives life to the universe. Let the sun rise and—look at it, isn't it dead? Everything is dead, and the dead are everywhere. Only people, and around them silence—that's the earth! "People, love one another"—who said that? whose testament is it? The pendulum ticks insensibly, disgustingly. It's two o'clock in the morning. Her little boots are standing by her bed, just as if they were waiting for her... No, seriously, when she's taken away tomorrow, what about me then?

THE DREAM OF A RIDICULOUS MAN

A FANTASTIC STORY

I

I AM A ridiculous man. They call me mad now. That would be a step up in rank, if I did not still remain as ridiculous to them as before. But now I'm no longer angry, now they are all dear to me, and even when they laugh at me—then, too, they are even somehow especially dear to me. I would laugh with them—not really at myself, but for love of them—if it weren't so sad for me to look at them. Sad because they don't know the truth, and I do know the truth. Ah, how hard it is to be the only one who knows the truth! But they won't understand that. No, they won't understand it.

Before, it caused me great anguish that I seemed ridiculous. Not seemed, but was. I was always ridiculous, and I know it, maybe right from birth. Maybe from the age of seven I already knew I was ridiculous. Then I went to school, then to the university, and what—the more I studied, the more I learned that I was ridiculous. So that for me, all my university education existed ultimately as if only to prove and explain to me, the deeper I went into it, that I was ridiculous. And as with learning, so with life. Every passing year the same consciousness grew and strengthened in me that my appearance was in all respects ridiculous. I was ridiculed by everyone and always. But none of them knew or suspected that if there was one man on earth who was more aware than anyone else of my ridiculousness, it was I myself, and this was the most vexing thing for me, that they didn't know it, but here I myself was to blame: I was always so proud that I would never confess it to anyone for anything. This pride grew in me over the years, and if it had so happened that I allowed myself to confess to anyone at all that I was ridiculous, I think that same evening I'd have blown my head off with a revolver. Oh, how I suffered in my youth over being unable to help myself and suddenly somehow confessing it to my comrades. But once I reached early manhood, I became a bit calmer for some reason, though with every passing year I learned more and more about my terrible quality. Precisely for some reason, because to this day I cannot determine why. Maybe because a dreadful anguish was growing in my soul over one circumstance which was infinitely higher than the whole of me: namely—the conviction was overtaking me that everywhere in the world it *made no difference*. I had had a presentiment of this for a very long time, but the full conviction came during the last year somehow suddenly. I suddenly felt that it would *make no difference* to me whether the world existed or there was nothing anywhere. I began to feel and know with my whole being that *with me there was nothing*. At first I kept thinking that instead there had been a lot before, but then I realized that there had been nothing before either, it only seemed so for some reason. Little by little I became convinced that there would never be anything. Then I suddenly stopped being angry with people and began almost not to notice them. Indeed, this was manifest even in the smallest trifles: it would happen, for instance, that I'd walk down the street and bump into people. It wasn't really because I was lost in thought: what could I have been thinking about, I had completely ceased to think then: it made no difference to me. And it would have been fine if I had resolved questions—oh, I never resolved a single one, and there were so many! But it began to *make no difference* to me, and the questions all went away.

And then, after that, I learned the truth. I learned the truth last November, precisely on the third of November, and since that time I remember my every moment. It was a gloomy evening, as gloomy as could be. I was returning home then, between ten and eleven o'clock, and I remember I precisely thought that there could not be a gloomier time. Even in the physical respect. Rain had poured down all day, and it was the coldest and gloomiest rain, even some sort of menacing rain, I remember that, with an obvious hostility to people, and now, between ten and eleven, it suddenly stopped, and a terrible dampness set in, damper and colder than when it was raining, and a sort of steam rose from everything, from every stone in the street and from every alleyway, if you looked far into its depths from the street. I suddenly imagined that if the gaslights went out everywhere, it would be more cheerful, and that with the gaslights it was sadder for the heart, because they threw light on it all. I'd had almost no dinner that day, and had spent since early evening sitting at some engineer's, with two more friends sitting there as well. I kept silent, and they seemed to be sick of me. They talked about something provocative and suddenly even grew excited. But it made no difference to them, I could see that, and they got excited just so. I suddenly told them that: "Gentlemen," I said, "it makes no difference to you." They weren't offended, but they all started laughing at me. It was because I said it without any reproach and simply because it made no difference to me. And they could see that it made no difference to me, and found that amusing.

When I thought in the street about the gaslights, I looked up at the sky. The sky was terribly dark, but one could clearly make out the torn clouds and the bottomless black spots between them. Suddenly in one of these spots I noticed a little star and began gazing at it intently. Because this little star gave me an idea: I resolved to kill myself that night. I had firmly resolved on it two months earlier, and, poor as I was, had bought an excellent revolver and loaded it that same day. But two months had passed and it was still lying in the drawer; but it made so little difference to me that I wished finally to seize a moment when it was less so—why, I didn't know. And thus, during those two months, returning home each night, I thought I was going to shoot myself. I kept waiting for the moment. And so now this little star gave me the idea, and I resolved that it would be that night *without fail*. And why the star gave me the idea—I don't know.

And so, as I was looking at the sky, this girl suddenly seized me by the elbow. The street was empty, and almost no one was about. Far off a coachman was sleeping in his droshky. The girl was about eight years old, in a kerchief and just a little dress, all wet, but I especially remembered her wet, torn shoes, and remember them now. They especially flashed before my eyes. She suddenly started pulling me by the elbow and calling out. She didn't cry, but somehow abruptly shouted some words, which she was unable to pronounce properly because she was chilled and shivering all over. She

was terrified by something and shouted desperately: "Mama! Mama!" I turned my face to her, but did not say a word and went on walking, but she was running and pulling at me, and in her voice there was the sound which in very frightened children indicates despair. I know that sound. Though she did not speak all the words out, I understood that her mother was dying somewhere, or something had happened with them there, and she had run out to call someone, to find something so as to help her mother. But I did not go with her, and, on the contrary, suddenly had the idea of chasing her away. First I told her to go and find a policeman. But she suddenly pressed her hands together and, sobbing, choking, kept running beside me and wouldn't leave me. It was then that I stamped my feet at her and shouted. She only cried out: "Mister! Mister!..." but suddenly she dropped me and ran headlong across the street: some other passerby appeared there, and she apparently rushed from me to him.

I went up to my fifth floor. I live in a rented room, a furnished one. It's a poor and small room, with a half-round garret window. I have an oilcloth sofa, a table with books on it, two chairs, and an armchair, as old as can be, but a Voltaire one. I sat down, lighted a candle, and began to think. Next door, in another room, behind a partition, there was a bedlam. It had been going on for two days. A retired captain lived there, and he had guests—some six scurvy fellows, drinking vodka and playing blackjack with used cards. The previous night they'd had a fight, and I know that two of them had pulled each other's hair for a long time. The landlady wanted to lodge a complaint, but she's terribly afraid of the captain. The only other tenants in our furnished rooms are a small, thin lady, an army wife and out-of-towner, with three small children who had already fallen ill in our rooms. She and her children are afraid of the captain to the point of fainting, and spend whole nights trembling and crossing themselves, and the smallest child had some sort of fit from fear. This captain, I know for certain, sometimes stops passersby on Nevsky Prospect and begs money from them. They won't take him into any kind of service, yet, strangely (this is what I've been driving at), in the whole month that he had been living with us, the captain had never aroused any vexation in me. Of course, I avoided making his acquaintance from the very start, and he himself got bored with me from the first, yet no matter how they shouted behind their partition, and however many they were—it never made any difference to me. I sit the whole night and don't really hear them—so far do I forget about them. I don't sleep at night until dawn, and that for a year now. I sit all night at the table in the armchair and do nothing. I read books only during the day. I sit and don't even think, just so, some thoughts wander about and I let them go. A whole candle burns down overnight. I quietly sat down at the table, took out the revolver, and placed it in front of me. As I placed it there, I remember asking myself: "Is it so?" and answering myself quite affirmatively: "It is." Meaning I would shoot myself. I knew that I would shoot myself that night for certain, but how long I would stay sitting at the table before then—that I did not know. And of course I would have shot myself if it hadn't been for that girl.

II

You see: though it made no difference to me, I did still feel pain, for instance. If someone hit me, I would feel pain. The same in the moral respect: if something very pitiful happened, I would feel pity, just as when it still made a difference to me in life. And I felt pity that night: I certainly would have helped a child. Why, then, had I not helped the little girl? From an idea that had come along then: as she was pulling and calling to me, a question suddenly arose before me, and I couldn't resolve it. The question was an idle one, but I got angry. I got angry owing to the conclusion that, if I had already resolved to kill myself that night, it followed that now more than ever everything in the world should make no difference to me. Why, then, did I suddenly feel that it did make a difference, and that I pitied the girl? I remember that I pitied her very much; even to the point of some strange pain, even quite incredible in my situation. Really, I'm unable to express the fleeting feeling I had then any better, but the feeling continued at home as well, when I had already settled at my table, and I was extremely vexed, as I hadn't been for a long time. Reasoning flowed from reasoning. It seemed clear that, if I was a man and not yet a zero, then, as long as I did not turn into a zero, I was alive, and consequently could suffer, be angry, and feel shame for my actions. Good. But if I was going to kill myself in two hours, for instance, then what was the girl to me and what did I care then about shame or anything in the world? I turned into a zero, an absolute zero. And could it be that the awareness that I would presently cease to exist *altogether*, and that therefore nothing would exist, could not have the slightest influence either on my feeling of pity for the girl, or upon the feeling of shame after the meanness I had committed? And I had stamped and shouted at the unfortunate child in a savage voice precisely because, "you see, not only do I feel no pity, but even if I commit some inhuman meanness, I can do so now, because in two hours everything will be extinguished." Do you believe this was why I shouted? I'm now almost convinced of it. It seemed clear that life and the world were now as if dependent on me. One might even say that the world was now as if made for me alone: I'd shoot myself and there would be no more world, at least for me. Not to mention that maybe there would indeed be nothing for anyone after me, and that as soon as my consciousness was extinguished, the whole world would be extinguished at once, like a phantom, like a mere accessory of my consciousness, it would be done away with, for maybe all this world and all these people were—just myself alone. I remember that, sitting and reasoning, I turned all these new questions, which came crowding one after another, even in quite a different direction and invented something quite new. For instance, there suddenly came to me a strange consideration, that if I had once lived on the moon or on Mars, and had committed some most shameful and dishonorable act there, such as can only be imagined, and had been abused and dishonored for it as one can only perhaps feel and imagine in a dream, a nightmare, and if, ending up later on earth, I continued to preserve an awareness of what I had done on the other planet, and knew at the same time that I would never ever return there, then, looking from the earth to the moon—would it *make any difference* to me, or not? Would I feel shame for that act, or not? The questions were idle and superfluous, since the revolver was already lying in front of me, and I knew with my whole being that *this* was certain to be, but they excited me, and I was getting furious. It was as if I couldn't die now without first resolving something. In short, this girl saved me, because with the questions I postponed the shot. Meanwhile, everything was also quieting down at the captain's: they had ended their card game and were settling down to sleep, grumbling and lazily finishing their squabbles. It was then that I suddenly fell asleep,

something that had never happened to me before, at the table, in the armchair. I fell asleep quite imperceptibly to myself. Dreams, as is known, are extremely strange: one thing is pictured with the most terrible clarity, with a jeweler's thoroughness in the finish of its details, and over other things you skip as if without noticing them at all—for instance, over space and time. Dreams apparently proceed not from reason but from desire, not from the head but from the heart, and yet what clever things my reason has sometimes performed in sleep! And yet quite inconceivable things happen with it in sleep. My brother, for instance, died five years ago. Sometimes I see him in my dreams: he takes part in my doings, we are both very interested, and yet I remember and am fully aware, throughout the whole dream, that my brother is dead and buried. Why, then, am I not surprised that, though he is dead, he is still here by me and busy with me? Why does my reason fully admit all this? But enough. I'll get down to my dream. Yes, I had this dream then, my dream of the third of November! They tease me now that it was just a dream. But does it make any difference whether it was a dream or not, if this dream proclaimed the Truth to me? For if you once knew the truth and saw it, then you know that it is the truth and there is and can be no other, whether you're asleep or alive. So let it be a dream, let it be, but this life, which you extol so much, I wanted to extinguish by suicide, while my dream, my dream—oh, it proclaimed to me a new, great, renewed, strong life! Listen.

III

I said that I fell asleep imperceptibly and even as if while continuing to reason about the same matters. Suddenly I dreamed that I took the revolver and, sitting there, aimed it straight at my heart—my heart, not my head; though I had resolved earlier to shoot myself in the head, and precisely in the right temple. Having aimed it at my chest, I waited for a second or two, and my candle, the table, and the wall facing me suddenly started moving and heaving. I hastily fired.

In dreams you sometimes fall from a height, or are stabbed, or beaten, but you never feel pain except when you are somehow really hurt in bed, then you do feel pain and it almost always wakes you up. So it was in my dream: I felt no pain, but I imagined that, as I fired, everything shook inside me and everything suddenly went out, and it became terribly black around me. I became as if blind and dumb, and now I'm lying on something hard, stretched out on my back, I don't see anything and can't make the slightest movement. Around me there is walking and shouting, there is the captain's bass and the landlady's shrieking—and suddenly another break, and now I'm being carried in a closed coffin. And I feel the coffin heave and I start reasoning about that, when suddenly for the first time I'm struck by the idea that I'm dead, quite dead, I know this and do not doubt it, I can't see, I can't move, yet I feel and reason. But I quickly come to terms with it and, as is usual in dreams, accept the reality without arguing.

And now they bury me in the ground. Everyone leaves, I'm alone, completely alone. I can't move. Always before, whenever I actually imagined to myself how I would be buried in the grave, my only association with the grave proper was the feeling of dampness and cold. So now, too, I felt that I was very cold, especially the tips of my toes, but I didn't feel anything else.

I lay there and, strangely—didn't expect anything, accepting without argument that a dead man has nothing to expect. But it was damp. I don't know how much time passed—an hour, or a few days, or many days. But then suddenly a drop of water that had seeped through the lid of the coffin fell on my closed left eye, another followed it in a minute, then a third a minute later, and so on and so on, with a minute's interval. A deep indignation suddenly blazed up in my heart, and suddenly I felt physical pain in it. "It's my wound," I thought, "it's my shot, there's a bullet there..." The drop kept dripping, each minute and straight onto my closed eye. And I suddenly called out, not in a voice, for I was motionless, but with my whole being, to the master of all that was coming to pass with me.

"Whoever you are, if you're there, and if there exists anything more reasonable than what is coming to pass now, allow it to be here, too. And if you are taking revenge on me for my unreasonable suicide by the ugliness and absurdity of my subsequent existence, know, then, that no matter what torment befalls me, it will never equal the contempt I am silently going to feel, even if the torment were to last millions of years!..."

I called out and fell silent. For almost a whole minute the deep silence lasted, and one more drop even fell, but I knew, boundlessly and inviolably, I knew and believed that everything was certain to change presently. And then suddenly my grave gaped wide. That is, I don't know whether it was opened and dug up, but I was taken by some dark being unknown to me, and we found ourselves in space. I suddenly could see again: it was deep night, and never, never has there been such darkness! We were rushing through space far from earth. I did not ask the one carrying me about anything, I waited and was proud. I assured myself that I was not afraid and swooned with delight at the thought that I was not afraid. I don't remember how long we rushed like that, and cannot imagine it: everything was happening as it always does in dreams, when you leap over space and time and over the laws of being and reason, and pause only on the points of the heart's reverie. I remember that I suddenly saw a little star in the darkness. "Is that Sirius?" I asked, suddenly unable to restrain myself, for I did not want to ask about anything. "No, it is the very star you saw between the clouds, as you were returning home," the being who was carrying me replied. I knew that it had as if a human countenance. Strangely, I did not like this being, I even felt a deep revulsion. I had expected complete nonexistence and with that had shot myself in the heart. And here I am in the hands of a being—not a human one, of course—but who is, who exists: "Ah, so there is life beyond the grave!" I thought with the strange light-mindedness of dreams, but the essence of my heart remained with me in all its depth: "And if I must *be* again," I thought, "and live again according to someone's ineluctable will, I don't want to be defeated and humiliated!" "You know I'm afraid of you, and you despise me for it," I said suddenly to my companion, unable to hold back the humiliating question, which contained a confession, and feeling my humiliation like the prick of a needle in my heart. He did not answer my question, but I suddenly felt that I was not despised or laughed at, and not even pitied, and that our journey had an unknown and mysterious purpose which concerned me alone. Fear was growing in my heart. Something was being communicated to me, mutely but tormentingly, from my silent companion, and was as if penetrating me. We were rushing through dark and unknown spaces. I had long ceased to see constellations familiar to the eye. I knew that in the heavenly spaces there were stars whose light reached the earth only

after thousands or millions of years. Maybe we were already flying through those spaces. I awaited something in a terrible anguish that wrung my heart. And suddenly the call of some highly familiar feeling shook me: I suddenly saw our sun! I knew it could not be *our* sun, which had generated *our* earth, and that we were at an infinite distance from our sun, but for some reason I recognized, with my whole being, that it was absolutely the same as our sun, its replica and double. The call of a sweet feeling sounded delightfully in my soul: the native power of light, the same light that gave birth to me, echoed in my heart and resurrected it, and I felt life, the former life, for the first time after my grave.

"But if this is the sun, if this is absolutely the same as our sun," I cried out, "then where is the earth?" And my companion pointed to the little star that shone in the darkness with an emerald brilliance. We were rushing straight toward her.

"And are such replicas really possible in the universe, is that really the law of nature?... And if that is the earth there, is it really the same as our earth... absolutely the same, unfortunate, poor, but dear and eternally beloved, giving birth to the same tormenting love for herself even in her most ungrateful children?..." I cried out, shaking with irrepressible, rapturous love for that former native earth I had abandoned. The image of the poor little girl whom I had offended flashed before me.

"You will see all," my companion replied, and some sadness sounded in his words. But we were quickly approaching the planet. It was growing before my eyes, I could already make out the ocean, the outlines of Europe, and suddenly a strange feeling of some great, holy jealousy blazed up in my heart: "How can there be such a replica, and what for? I love, I can love, only the earth I left, where the stains of my blood were left, when I, the ungrateful one, extinguished my life with a shot in the heart. But never, never did I cease to love that earth, and even on that night, as I was parting from her, I perhaps loved her more tormentingly than ever before. Is there suffering on this new earth? On our earth we can love truly only with suffering and through suffering! We're unable to love otherwise and we know no other love. I want suffering, in order to love. I want, I thirst, to kiss, this very minute, pouring out tears, that one earth alone which I left, and I do not want, I do not accept life on any other!..."

But my companion had already left me. Suddenly, as if quite imperceptibly, I came to stand on this other earth, in the bright light of a sunny day, lovely as paradise. I was standing, it seems, on one of those islands which on our earth make up the Greek archipelago, or somewhere on the coast of the mainland adjacent to that archipelago. Oh, everything was exactly as with us, but seemed everywhere to radiate some festivity and a great, holy, and finally attained triumph. The gentle emerald sea splashed softly against the shores and kissed them with love—plain, visible, almost conscious. Tall, beautiful trees stood in all the luxury of their flowering, and their numberless leaves, I was convinced, greeted me with their soft, gentle sound, as if uttering words of love. The grass glittered with bright, fragrant flowers. Flocks of birds flew about in the air and, fearless of me, landed on my shoulders and arms, joyfully beating me with their dear, fluttering wings. And finally I got to see and know the people of that happy earth. They came to me themselves, they surrounded me, kissed me. Children of the sun, children of their sun—oh, how beautiful they were! Never on earth have I seen such beauty in man. Maybe only in our children, in their first years, can one find a remote, though faint, glimmer of that beauty. The eyes of these happy people shone with clear brightness. Their faces radiated reason and a sort of consciousness fulfilled to the point of serenity, yet they were mirthful faces; a childlike joy sounded in the words and voices of these people. Oh, at once, with the first glance at their faces, I understood everything, everything! This was the earth undefiled by the fall, the people who lived on it had not sinned, they lived in the same paradise in which, according to the legends of all mankind, our fallen forefathers lived, with the only difference that the whole earth here was everywhere one and the same paradise. These people, laughing joyfully, crowded around me and caressed me; they took me with them and each of them wished to set me at ease. Oh, they didn't ask me about anything, but it seemed to me as if they already knew everything, and wished quickly to drive the torment from my face.

IV

You see, once again: well, let it be only a dream! But the feeling of love from these innocent and beautiful people remained in me ever after, and I feel that their love pours upon me from there even now. I saw them myself, I knew them and was convinced, I loved them, I suffered for them afterward. Oh, I at once understood, even then, that in many ways I would never understand them; to me, a modern Russian progressive and vile Petersburger, it seemed insoluble, for instance, that they, while knowing so much, did not have our science. But I soon realized that their knowledge was fulfilled and nourished by different insights than on our earth, and that their aspirations were also quite different. They did not wish for anything and were at peace, they did not aspire to a knowledge of life, as we do, because their life was fulfilled. But their knowledge was deeper and loftier than our science; for our science seeks to explain what life is, it aspires to comprehend it, in order to teach others to live; but they know how to live even without science, and I understood that, but I could not understand their knowledge. They pointed out their trees to me, and I could not understand the extent of the love with which they looked at them: as if they were talking with creatures of their own kind. And you know, perhaps I wouldn't be mistaken if I said that they did talk to them! Yes, they had found their language, and I'm convinced that the trees understood them. They looked at the whole of nature in the same way—at the animals, who lived in peace with them, did not attack them, and loved them, won over by their love. They pointed out the stars to me and talked of them with me about something I couldn't understand, but I'm convinced that they had some contact, as it were, with the heavenly stars, not just in thought, but in some living way. Oh, these people did not even try to make me understand them, they loved me even without that, but on the other hand I knew that they would also never understand me, and therefore I hardly ever spoke to them about our earth. I only kissed before them that earth on which they lived and wordlessly adored them, and they saw it and allowed me to adore them without being ashamed of my adoring them, because they loved much themselves. They did not suffer for me when sometimes, in tears, I kissed their feet, joyfully knowing at heart with what force of love they would respond to me. At times I asked myself in astonishment: how could they manage, all this while, not to insult a man such as I, and never once provoke in a man such

as I any feeling of jealousy or envy? Many times I asked myself how I, a braggart and a liar, could manage not to speak to them about my knowledge—of which they, of course, had no notion—not to wish to astonish them with it, if only out of love for them? They were frisky and gay as children. They wandered through their beautiful groves and forests, they sang their beautiful songs, they ate their light food—fruit from their trees, honey from their forests, and milk from the animals who loved them. For their food and clothing they labored little and but lightly. There was love among them, and children were born, but I never observed in them any impulses of that *cruel* sensuality that overtakes almost everyone on our earth, each and every one, and is the only source of almost all the sins of our mankind. They rejoiced in the children they had as new partakers of their bliss. Among them there was no quarreling or jealousy, they did not even understand what it meant. Their children were everyone's children, because they all constituted one family. They had almost no illnesses, though there was death; but their old people died quietly, as if falling asleep, surrounded by those bidding them farewell, blessing them, smiling at them, and receiving bright parting smiles themselves. I saw no sorrow or tears at that, there was only love increased as if to the point of rapture, but a rapture that was calm, fulfilled, contemplative. One might think they were in touch with their dead even after their death and that the earthly union between them was not interrupted by death. They barely understood me when I asked them about eternal life, but they were apparently so convinced of it unconsciously that it did not constitute a question for them. They had no temples, but they had some essential, living, and constant union with the Entirety of the universe; they had no faith, but instead had a firm knowledge that when their earthly joy was fulfilled to the limits of earthly nature, there would then come for them, both for the living and for the dead, a still greater expansion of their contract with the Entirety of the universe. They waited for this moment with joy, but without haste, without suffering over it, but as if already having it in the presages of their hearts, which they conveyed to one another. In the evenings, before going to sleep, they liked to sing in balanced, harmonious choruses. In these songs they expressed all the feelings that the departing day had given them, praised it, and bade it farewell. They praised nature, the earth, the sea, the forest. They liked to compose songs about each other and praised each other like children; these were the most simple songs, but they flowed from the heart and penetrated hearts. And not in songs only, but it seemed they spent their whole life only in admiring each other. It was a sort of mutual being-in-love, total, universal. And some of their songs, solemn and rapturous, I hardly understood at all. While I understood the words, I was never able to penetrate their full meaning. It remained as if inaccessible to my mind, yet my heart was as if unconsciously pervaded by it more and more. I often told them that I had long ago had a presentiment of all this, that all this joy and glory had already spoken to me on our earth in an anguished call, sometimes reaching the point of unbearable sorrow; that I had a presentiment of them all and of their glory in the dreams of my heart and the reveries of my mind, that I had often been unable, on our earth, to watch the setting sun without tears... That my hatred of the people of our earth always contained anguish: why am I unable to hate them without loving them, why am I unable not to forgive them, and why is there anguish in my love for them: why am I unable to love them without hating them? They listened to me, and I saw that they could not imagine what I was talking about, but I did not regret talking to them about it: I knew they understood all the intensity of my anguish for those whom I had abandoned. Yes, when they looked at me with their dear eyes pervaded by love, when I felt that in their presence my heart, too, became as innocent and truthful as theirs, I did not regret not understanding them. The feeling of the fullness of life took my breath away, and I silently worshipped them.

Oh, everyone laughs in my face now and assures me that even in dreams one cannot see such details as I'm now telling, that in my dream I saw or felt only a certain sensation generated by my own heart in delirium, and that I invented the details when I woke up. And when I disclosed to them that perhaps it was actually so—God, what laughter they threw in my face, what fun they had at my expense! Oh, yes, of course, I was overcome just by the sensation of that dream, and it alone survived in the bloody wound of my heart: yet the real images and forms of my dream, that is, those that I actually saw at the time of my dreaming, were fulfilled so harmoniously, they were so enchanting and beautiful, and so true, that having awakened, I was, of course, unable to embody them in our weak words, so that they must have been as if effaced in my mind, and therefore, indeed, perhaps I myself unconsciously was forced to invent the details afterward; and of course distorted them, especially with my so passionate desire to hurry and tell them at least somehow. And yet how can I not believe that it all really was? And was, perhaps, a thousand times better, brighter, and more joyful than I'm telling? Let it be a dream, still it all could not but be. You know, I'll tell you a secret: perhaps it wasn't a dream at all! For here a certain thing happened, something so terribly true that it couldn't have been imagined in a dream. Let my dream have been generated by my heart, but was my heart alone capable of generating the terrible truth that happened to me afterward? How could I myself invent or imagine it in my heart? Can it be that my paltry heart and capricious, insignificant mind were able to rise to such a revelation of the truth! Oh, judge for yourselves: I've concealed it so far, but now I'll finish telling this truth as well. The thing was that I... corrupted them all!

V

Yes, yes, it ended with me corrupting them all! How it could have happened I don't know, but I remember it clearly. The dream flew through thousands of years and left in me just a sense of the whole. I know only that the cause of the fall was I. Like a foul trichina, like an atom of plague infecting whole countries, so I infected that whole happy and previously sinless earth with myself. They learned to lie and began to love the lie and knew the beauty of the lie. Oh, maybe it started *innocently*, with a joke, with coquetry, with amorous play, maybe, indeed, with an atom, but this atom of lie penetrated their hearts, and they liked it. Then sensuality was quickly born, sensuality generated jealousy, and jealousy—cruelty... Oh, I don't know, I don't remember, but soon, very soon, the first blood was shed; they were astonished and horrified, and began to part, to separate. Alliances appeared, but against each other now. Rebukes, reproaches began. They knew shame, and shame was made into a virtue. The notion of honor was born, and each alliance raised its own banner. They began tormenting animals, and the animals withdrew from them into the forests and became their enemies. There began the struggle for separation, for isolation, for the personal, for mine and yours. They started speaking

different languages. They knew sorrow and came to love sorrow, they thirsted for suffering and said that truth is attained only through suffering. Then science appeared among them. When they became wicked, they began to talk of brotherhood and humaneness and understood these ideas. When they became criminal, they invented justice and prescribed whole codices for themselves in order to maintain it, and to ensure the codices they set up the guillotine. They just barely remembered what they had lost, and did not even want to believe that they had once been innocent and happy. They even laughed at the possibility of the former happiness and called it a dream. They couldn't even imagine it in forms and images, but—strange and wonderful thing—having lost all belief in their former happiness, having called it a fairy tale, they wished so much to be innocent and happy again, once more, that they fell down before their hearts' desires like children, they deified their desire, they built temples and started praying to their own idea, their own "desire," all the while fully believing in its unrealizability and unfeasibility, but adoring it in tears and worshipping it. And yet, if it had so happened that they could have returned to that innocent and happy condition which they had lost, or if someone had suddenly shown it to them again and asked them: did they want to go back to it?—they would certainly have refused. They used to answer me: "Granted we're deceitful, wicked, and unjust, we *know* that and weep for it, and we torment ourselves over it, and torture and punish ourselves perhaps even more than that merciful judge who will judge us and whose name we do not know. But we have science, and through it we shall again find the truth, but we shall now accept it consciously, knowledge is higher than feelings, the consciousness of life is higher than life. Science will give us wisdom, wisdom will discover laws, and knowledge of the laws of happiness is higher than happiness." That's what they used to say, and after such words each of them loved himself more than anyone else, and they couldn't have done otherwise. Each of them became so jealous of his own person that he tried as hard as he could to humiliate and belittle it in others, and gave his life to that. Slavery appeared, even voluntary slavery: the weak willingly submitted to the strong, only so as to help them crush those still weaker than themselves. Righteous men appeared, who came to these people in tears and spoke to them of their pride, their lack of measure and harmony, their loss of shame. They were derided or stoned. Holy blood was spilled on the thresholds of temples. On the other hand, people began to appear who started inventing ways for everyone to unite again, so that each of them, without ceasing to love himself more than anyone else, would at the same time not hinder others, and thus live all together in a harmonious society, as it were. Whole wars arose because of this idea. At the same time, the warring sides all firmly believed that science, wisdom, and the sense of self-preservation would finally force men to unite in a harmonious and reasonable society, and therefore, to speed things up meanwhile, the "wise" tried quickly to exterminate all the "unwise," who did not understand their idea, so that they would not hinder its triumph. But the sense of self-preservation quickly began to weaken, proud men and sensualists appeared who directly demanded everything or nothing. To acquire everything, they resorted to evil-doing, and if that did not succeed—to suicide. Religions appeared with a cult of nonbeing and self-destruction for the sake of eternal peace in nothingness. Finally, these people grew weary in meaningless toil, and suffering appeared on their faces, and these people proclaimed that suffering is beauty, for only in suffering is there thought. They sang suffering in their songs. I walked among them, wringing my hands, and wept over them, but I loved them perhaps still more than before, when there was as yet no suffering on their faces and they were innocent and so beautiful. I loved their defiled earth still more than when it had been a paradise, only because grief had appeared on it. Alas, I had always loved grief and sorrow, but only for myself, for myself, while over them I wept, pitying them. I stretched out my arms to them, in despair accusing, cursing, and despising myself. I told them that I, I alone, had done it all; that it was I who had brought them depravity, infection, and the lie! I beseeched them to crucify me on a cross, I taught them how to make a cross. I couldn't, I hadn't the strength to kill myself, but I wanted to take the suffering from them, I longed for suffering, I longed to shed my blood to the last drop in this suffering. But they just laughed at me and in the end began to consider me some sort of holy fool. They vindicated me, they said they had received only what they themselves had wanted, and that everything could not but be as it was. Finally, they announced to me that I was becoming dangerous for them and that they would put me in a madhouse if I didn't keep quiet. Here sorrow entered my soul with such force that my heart was wrung, and I felt I was going to die, and here... well, here I woke up.

It was already morning, that is, not light yet, but it was about six o'clock. I came to my senses in the same armchair, my candle had burned all the way down, everyone was asleep at the captain's, and around me was a silence rare in our apartment. First of all, I jumped up extremely surprised; nothing like that had ever happened to me, even down to trifling little details: for instance, never before had I fallen asleep in my armchair like that. Here suddenly, while I was standing and coming to my senses—suddenly my revolver flashed before me, ready, loaded—but I instantly pushed it away from me! Oh, life, life now! I lifted up my arms and called out to the eternal truth; did not call out, but wept; rapture, boundless rapture, elevated my whole being. Yes, life and—preaching! I decided on preaching that same moment, and, of course, for the rest of my life! I'm going out to preach, I want to preach—what? The truth, for I saw it, saw it with my own eyes, saw all its glory!

And so, since then I've been preaching! What's more—I love those who laugh at me more than all the rest. Why that's so I don't know and can't explain, but let it be so. They say I'm already getting confused now, that is, if I'm already so confused now, how will it be later? The veritable truth: I'm getting confused now, and maybe it will be worse later. And of course I'm going to get confused a few times before I discover how to preach, that is, in what words and in what deeds, because it's very hard to do. I see it clear as day even now, but listen: is there anyone who doesn't get confused? And yet everyone goes toward one and the same thing, at least everyone strives for one and the same thing, from the sage to the last robber, only by different paths. This is an old truth, but what is new here is this: I cannot get very confused. Because I saw the truth, I saw and I know that people can be beautiful and happy without losing the ability to live on earth. I will not and cannot believe that evil is the normal condition of people. And they all laugh merely at this belief of mine. But how can I not believe: I saw the truth—it's not that my mind invented it, but I saw it, I saw it, and its *living image* filled my soul for all time. I saw it in such fulfilled wholeness that I cannot believe it is impossible for people to have it. And so, how could I get confused? I'll wander off, of course, even several times, and will maybe even speak in other people's words, but not for long: the living image of what I saw will always be with me and will always correct and direct me. Oh,

I'm hale, I'm fresh, I'm going, going, even if it's for a thousand years. You know, I even wanted to conceal, at first, that I corrupted them all, but that was a mistake—already the first mistake! But truth whispered to me that I was *lying*, and guarded and directed me. But how to set up paradise—I don't know, because I'm unable to put it into words. After my dream, I lost words. At least all the main words, the most necessary ones. But so be it: I'll go and I'll keep talking, tirelessly, because after all I saw it with my own eyes, though I can't recount what I saw. But that is what the scoffers don't understand: "He had a dream," they say, "a delirium, a hallucination." Eh! As if that's so clever? And how proud they are! A dream? what is a dream? And is our life not a dream? I'll say more: let it never, let it never come true, and let there be no paradise (that I can understand!)—well, but I will preach all the same. And yet it's so simple: in one day, *in one hour*—it could all be set up at once! The main thing is—love others as yourself, that's the main thing, and it's everything, there's no need for anything else at all: it will immediately be discovered how to set things up. And yet this is merely an old truth, repeated and read a billion times, but still it has never taken root! "The consciousness of life is higher than life, the knowledge of the laws of happiness is higher than happiness"—that is what must be fought! And I will. If only everyone wants it, everything can be set up at once.

And I found that little girl... And I'll go! I'll go!